

Case information

Reference/Case ID		201507696	
Scheduled Monument	Caisteal Bharraich, Tower		
Index no	M1896	Grid Ref	NC580567 258000.0000 956700.0000
Date of Application	07 March 2016	Application Received	08 March 2016
Summary of proposed works	This report recommends approval for the consolidation and repair of the castle, and the installation of a stainless steel staircase and a viewing platform to improve access.		

1. Summary recommendation

This report recommends approval for the consolidation and repair of the castle, and the installation of a stainless steel staircase and a viewing platform to improve access.

2. Background

The monument comprises the remains of a small tower house standing upon the summit of a promontory high above the Kyle of Tongue. Its history is unknown, although it is thought that the current building is a 16th-century reconstruction of an earlier tower and to have belonged to the Bishop of Caithness, who stayed here on his way from his castle at Scrabster to his property of Balnakiel. It has associations with 11th-century Norse occupation and with the Sutherland Clan Mackay. It is also an important landmark in Tongue. It is probable that the castle was abandoned well before the 18th century, and there is no record available of any recent maintenance or repair.

The monument was scheduled in 2002 and the scheduled area includes the upstanding tower house, and an area around it which has the potential for the survival of associated archaeology. HES commissioned an advisory condition report of the castle in 2002 and this identified significant issues with the walls such as cracks, voids bows and bulges. The castle was subject to the collapse of the east wall in January 2015 after severe winter storms. This event demonstrated that the integrity of the monument was at risk if these issues were not addressed.

Following a site visit to assess the collapse, our report was updated and given to the owner. HES then engaged in very positive and productive pre-application discussions with the applicant. The approach taken is sensitive, well discussed and justified and a high level of information has been included with the SMC.

3. Proposals

The basis for the proposal are outlined in Section 5 of the Supporting Statement and the proposed works are outlined in Section 6. They include the following:

(i) Consolidation and repair

- vegetation removal from walls and masonry joints
- capping of wallheads with suitable lime mortar
- general repairs to rubble walls
- re-instatement of part of the collapsed east wall
- replacement of missing door sill
- potential dunting of masonry to ensure working area is safe
- re-bedding of loose stones in the internal door
- stainless steel ties to hold the wallface to the core

(ii) Access improvements

- the installation of steps to the entrance
- the installation of an internal spiral staircase and viewing platform with safety barrier

The majority of the consolidation and repair of the monument can be summarised as non-intrusive masonry repair using traditional techniques using a suitable lime mortar. Where new materials are proposed, they are as replacements for missing historic fabric, although no details of what type of material is presently unclear and will need to be discussed further and agreed.

More intrusive measures include the re-instatement of part of the collapsed east wall, the potential dunting of masonry, the potential installation of ties to hold the wallface to the core and the replacement of missing door sill. Sufficient photographic evidence will allow of the reinstatement of the collapsed east wall to closely match the historic fabric. A full survey of the existing historic masonry fabric will be undertaken to ensure so that any dunted and/or rebidged masonry can be placed in their original positions as far as possible. Although advice from a structural engineer on site is required, recording will also assist with any requirement to dunt any unsafe masonry. The requirement for the steel ties, and the type of stone to be used for the missing door sill will be clarified and agreed further. The sill is proposed to match the historic one and help prevent exacerbating the current erosion caused by visitors using this entrance point.

The installation of a metal structure to facilitate access to the monument will involve more intrusive measures. The proposed stainless steel steps at the entrance to the monument would facilitate access as there is currently a 1m difference in levels; the internal staircase is proposed to enhance the visitor experience by enabling access to higher levels of the monument.

An assessment of the potential impact on the historic fabric of the monument of these proposals is discussed further below.

4. Representations received

No representations were received.

5. Report

a) Policy considerations

The application should be viewed with the following legislative and policy considerations in mind:

3.14. Scottish Ministers include a monument in the Schedule to secure the long-term legal protection of the monument in the national interest, *in situ* and as far as possible in the state it has come down to us. Scheduled monuments have an intrinsic value as monuments, not related to any concept of active use. It is the value of the monument to the nation's heritage, in terms set out in the section on Scheduling in Chapter 2 of SHEP that is the primary consideration in determining applications for scheduled monument consent.

3.16. Works on scheduled monuments should therefore normally be the minimum level of intervention that is consistent with conserving what is culturally significant in a monument.

3.17. As each monument will require treatment specific to its individual nature, characteristics, significance and needs, any proposed change to it must be fully and explicitly justified.

3.18. Scheduled monument consent applications must be considered in terms of the cultural significance of the monument and the impact that the proposals would have upon this cultural significance. The more important particular features of the monument are to its cultural significance, the greater will be the case against interventions which modify these features.

3.20. Where change is proposed, it should be carefully considered, based on good authority, sensitively designed, properly planned and executed, and where appropriate in the context of an individual monument, reversible.

b) Assessment

The condition of the monument has been poor for some time and therefore the proposed consolidation will be a significant benefit to the monument. The access improvements will facilitate access to the monument and enhance the visitor experience. However, as there are potential low level impacts on the monument's historic fabric from the proposed works, these are discussed further below.

The scaffold

The proposed scaffold will not be dependent on the castle structure for support, it will not be fixed to the masonry and ties will utilise existing openings. The applicant suggests the scaffold will not be fixed to the bedrock but held down by ballast. However, the final decision is dependent on the further advice of an engineer and therefore the potential impacts associated with the fixing of the scaffold to the ground are presently unclear and will need to be clarified further.

Consolidation and repair

The proposed consolidation and repair of the monument will involve re-statement of historic fabric, the re-bedding of loose stones and the capping of the wall head with appropriate lime mortar based on advice from our Conservation Architect's report and the Scottish Lime Centre Trust.

More intrusive measures are involved although these are relatively minimal. These include the re-instatement of part of the collapsed east wall, the potential dunting of any unsafe masonry, the potential installation of ties to hold the wallface to the core and the replacement of missing door sill. Accurate reinstatement of the recently collapsed east wall will be enabled through the use of previous photographic recording. Although the reinstated wall may lack some authenticity value it will help restore the form and wider cultural significance of the tower and help with providing structural stability. Prior to any work including dunting, a full photographic record of the existing historic masonry fabric will be undertaken and stones will be marked. These measures will ensure so that the stones are placed in their original positions as far as possible. The new door sill will be in keeping with the historic fabric and will help redress erosion issues caused by visitors, it will therefore facilitate continued access and be beneficial to the monument's long term preservation.

The requirement for the proposed insertion of the stainless steel ties is unclear. It is likely that they may be necessary to enable the castle to be consolidated and will not have a significant impact on the cultural significance of the monument. However, further clarification is needed to ensure that these ties are the minimum level of intervention necessary. As no external fixings to these ties are proposed, the likely visual impact is negligible.

Any addition of any new stones, including the re-building of the collapsed east wall, will need further discussion in order to determine what type of stone will be used.

Access

The installation of the external steps and internal staircase and viewing platform will have a minimal impact on the monument. The applicant's options appraisal assessed various proposals, and their preferred option is a galvanised/stainless steel structure which is robust so as to minimise potential long-term maintenance issues, as well as being lightweight. The impact on the historic fabric would be minimised as far as possible by being fixed where masonry has been repaired (where possible), although the exact locations of fixings will be finalised and agreed further. This structure would also be reversible.

The external steps and internal stairway occupy a relatively small footprint, thereby minimising any ground disturbance. The potential impact on any below-ground archaeology would be mitigated through a Written Scheme of Investigation.

Given their design and location, the visual impact of the external steps and internal staircase will not have a significant adverse impact on the setting of the monument. As discussed above, the proposed design of the structure has taken into account this impact, considering both the material to be used, and the location. The galvanised/stainless steel structure will be finished so as to minimise any glare from the metal. While the external steps and internal staircase will be visible, the impact on views looking towards the castle will not be significant.

The improvement of access to the castle will have added on wider public benefits. These include facilitating visitors' access to the castle interior, but also enhancing the visitor experience. After the completion of the proposed works, visitors would be able to reach its upper levels, look out from the castle wallhead and appreciate the castle within its landscape.

The proposed interpretation will also enhance the visitor experience by providing information about the castle's history. These panels will have a minimal impact on historic fabric as they will either be placed on the metal structure, or outwith the scheduled area of the monument.

Their final location will be discussed and agreed further to ensure the impact on the historic fabric of the monument, and on its setting, is minimised as far as possible.

Maintenance

The Supporting Statement includes a commitment to undertake 5 yearly inspections to monitor the condition of the castle. This would have a significant positive benefit to the monument as any maintenance issues can be identified and repaired and help to ensure the preservation of the monument.

Conclusion

The proposed works will represent a significant benefit to the historic fabric of the monument and will not adversely impact on its cultural significance. The Supporting Statement includes a commitment to providing HES with further information which will help to clarify some of the outstanding issues identified above e.g. a Scheme of Works, and a Written Scheme of Investigation to identify whether any below ground archaeology will need to be investigated and recorded.

c) Other material considerations, including impact of the works on Protected Species and Places

None.

d) Conclusion

In conclusion, the proposed consolidation and repair of the castle and the improvement of access will help to conserve the monument over the long term, and will enhance visitor access and experience.

The proposed works are compliant with Section 3.14 of the SHEP in that they will help to secure the long-term legal protection of the monument as far as possible in the state it has come down to us. The proposals also accord with Section 3.16 of the SHEP as they are the minimum level of intervention that is consistent with conserving what is culturally significant in the monument. In addition, they accord with Section 3.20 as the proposed change is carefully considered, sensitively designed and reversible.

The options appraisal undertaken by the applicant considered various proposals in order to enhance the visitor experience at the castle and these are set out fully in Section 6. The access improvements would not have a negative impact upon the monument and would therefore not conflict with any of these policies.

The Supporting Statement includes a commitment to provide HES with a Scheme of Works and a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) before any works commence and these will clarify any outstanding issues that need to be discussed and agreed. Related conditions to the consent have been included to ensure that HES have a timetable of works, and that a written report is provided to HES once works have been completed.

6. Recommended decision

Subject to compliance with the schedule of conditions, the works proposed are considered acceptable in meeting the terms of national policy for scheduled monuments, and also accounting for other material considerations.

I therefore recommend consent is **granted**, subject to the conditions detailed below.

7. Conditions

Two weeks before any works begin on site, the applicant shall inform Historic Environment Scotland and the local authority archaeologist in writing of the likely timetable of works. Any changes to that timetable shall also be notified to both bodies.

Reason: to enable a representative of Historic Environment Scotland to have the opportunity to inspect the work for which consent is granted, and to inform the local authority archaeological service of the proposed works.

Two weeks after completion of the works on site, the applicant will provide a comprehensive set of photographs of the work areas, taken before during and after the works, to Historic Environment Scotland.

Reason: To ensure that an accurate record of works to the monument is maintained.

8. Approval

Officer	Nicola Hall	Date	28/04/2016
Approved by	John Raven	Date	28/4/16

Annex A – list of supporting documents

Supporting Statement
Appendices