

Case information

Case ID	300016803
File Reference	AMJ/9306/1/1
Name of Site	Whitegate Broch

Local Authority	Highland Council
National Grid Reference	ND 3541 6120
Designation No. (if any)	SM13621
Case Type	Designation

Received/Start Date	23/04/2015
Decision Date	15/06/2016

1. Decision

The assessment against criteria demonstrates that the monument is of national importance. The decision is to add the monument to the schedule of nationally important monuments as **Whitegate Broch**.

2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

2.1 Designation Background

The monument is currently undesignated.

2.2 Development Proposals

There are no known development proposals.

3. Assessment

3.1 Assessment information

The site was considered for amendment as part of the 2015 Highland project and visited on 23/04/2015.

3.2 Assessment against designation criteria

An assessment against the Scheduling criteria has been carried out (see Annex A). The monument was found to meet the criteria for scheduling.

The designation criteria are published in the Historic Environment Scotland policy statement June 2016, Annex 1, pp. 48-50.

<https://www.historicenvironment.scot/advice-and-support/planning-and-guidance/legislation-and-guidance/historic-environment-scotland-policy-statement/>

3.3 Other considerations

N/A

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ANNEX A – Assessment Against the Scheduling Criteria

Whitegate Broch

1 Description

The monument is a broch, a complex stone-built substantial roundhouse, dating from the Iron Age (between 600BC and 400AD). The broch is visible as the exposed foundations of a solid based stone-built roundhouse. The broch is located on a flat raised beach overlooking Sinclair's Bay.

The broch measures approximately 16m in overall diameter, with an internal diameter of around 8m. An entrance is visible on the south east side of the broch, while exposed stone facing indicate the presence of the inner and outer faces of the broch wall. The interior of the broch is divided by flagstone partitions and the entrance passage is extended outwards through a series of buildings containing four irregular shaped chambers. The internal divisions and the outbuildings appear to be secondary to the construction of the broch.

The scheduled area is circular in plan, measuring 40m in diameter, to include the remains described above and an area around them within which evidence relating to the monument's construction, use and abandonment is expected to survive, and adjoining land essential for the monument's support and preservation, as shown in red on the accompanying map. The scheduling specifically excludes the above ground elements of the dry-stone wall and post-and-wire fence, to allow for their maintenance and upkeep.

2 Assessment Against the Scheduling Criteria (Historic Environment Scotland policy statement June 2016, Annex 1, pp. 48-50.)

2.1 Intrinsic Characteristics

The monument is a broch, visible as a low grass covered stony mound with a central depression. Past excavation has revealed substantial sections of the broch's walling, along with an entrance on its eastern side. The broch has been excavated on multiple occasions, the first by Sir Francis Tress Barry, who carried out a larger scale clearance of the interior of the monument in 1892-93, exposing much of what is currently visible. Further excavations were undertaken in 2006, 2007 and 2008 by AOC Archaeology Group. Although the broch has been substantially excavated, the structural remains survive in good condition and the site has high potential to support future archaeological research. The broch and any associated structures are likely to contain further occupation deposits, artefacts and palaeoenvironmental evidence that can tell us about how people lived, their trade and exchange contacts, and their social status, as well as provide information about broch architecture and construction methods.

Brochs in Sutherland and Caithness are typically thought to date from between 600 BC and AD 400. The presence of internal partitions and outbuildings indicates this site is likely to have had a complex development sequence, which adds to the significance of the monument. Scientific study of the site would allow us to develop a better understanding of the chronology of the site, including its date of origin, state of completeness and any possible development sequence.

Broch towers are primarily seen as a specific specialised development of complex Atlantic roundhouses. They were large complex structures that could have accommodated either an extended family or a small community. While there would have been a social hierarchy within this community, the construction of these elaborate towers is often understood in terms of elite settlement. Other interpretations have stressed their likely role as fortified or defensive sites, possibly serving a community across a wider area. Brochs are complex structures likely to have had numerous purposes and a complex role in prehistoric society.

2.2 Contextual Characteristics

Brochs are a widespread class of monument across northern Scotland with notable concentrations in Caithness, Sutherland, Orkney, Shetland, the Western Isles and the northwest Highlands. This monument is important as an upstanding and well-preserved example, located in close proximity to a number of other brochs. There are three brochs at Keiss; Keiss Harbour, Keiss Tofts and Whitegate and they are located within extremely close proximity of one another. They form one of the densest concentration of brochs in Scotland, the group being comparable with the similar density of brochs on Rousay, Orkney, where three brochs are located on a short stretch of coast at Westness. There is high potential for comparative study on a local and national scale to better understand the function of such monuments, their interrelationship and the significance of their placing within the landscape, in particular in relation to our understanding of Iron Age social hierarchy, changing settlement patterns and systems of inheritance.

Whitegate is situated near the coast, in prominent position with open views out to sea to the east. Many broch towers were deliberately sited to be focal points in the landscape, and this example would have been clearly visible from the sea.

2.3 Associative Characteristics

N/A

3 Purpose and implications of scheduling

The field investigation concluded the site is in a stable condition and very well preserved. There are no immediate threats to the preservation of the monument. Therefore designation as a scheduled monument remains the most appropriate mechanism to secure the preservation of the monument, and ensure the recognition of its national importance.

4 Assessment of national importance

This monument is of national importance because it has an inherent potential to make a significant addition to our understanding of the past, in particular of Iron Age society in Caithness and the function, use and development of brochs. This is a well-preserved example of a broch with identifiable architectural features including an entrance and evidence for a stair. The presence of secondary internal and external structures also demonstrates an extended development history at this site. The broch adds to our understanding of settlement patterns and social structure during the Iron Age around Sinclair's Bay and this potential is enhanced by the broadly contemporary monuments in the vicinity, specifically the high density of brochs around Keiss. The loss of the monument would significantly diminish our future ability to appreciate and understand the development, use and re-use of brochs, and the nature of Iron Age society, economy and social hierarchy in the north of Scotland.

5 References

Historic Environment Scotland <http://www.canmore.org.uk> CANMORE ID 9328 (accessed on 13/04/2015).

The Highland Council HER reference is MHG1645 (accessed on 13/04/2015).

Anderson, J. (1901) Notices of nine Brochs along the Caithness coast from Keiss Bay to Skirza Head, excavated by Sir Francis Tress Barry, Bart., MP., of Keiss Castle, Caithness', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, vol. 35, 1900-1.

Barber, J. and Heald, A. (2015) *Caithness Archaeology: Aspects of Prehistory*, Whittles Publishing, Dunbeath.

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