



## Case information

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Case ID	300016802
File Reference	AMJ/9307/1/1
Name of Site	Keiss Broch

Local Authority	Highland Council
National Grid Reference	ND 3531 6108
Designation No. (if any)	SM13623
Case Type	Designation

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

## 1. Decision

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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 **Keiss Broch**.

## 2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

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### 2.1 Designation Background

The monument is currently undesignated.

### 2.2 Development Proposals

There are no known development proposals.

## 3. Assessment

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### 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

Keiss Broch

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## 1 Description

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The monument is a broch, a complex stone-built substantial roundhouse, dating from the Iron Age (between 600 BC and 400 AD). The broch is visible as a low grass-covered stony mound with a central depression that contains traces of surviving walling and the entrance. It is located on a raised beach overlooking Sinclair's Bay.

The broch measures about 18.9m in overall diameter, while the broch has an internal diameter of around 11.6m and stands to about 2m in height. An entrance with a lintel is visible on the east side of the broch, while exposed boulders indicate the presence of the inner and outer faces of the broch wall. The interior of the broch was divided by flagstone partitions, visible as stones projecting above the turf, while externally there are a number of enclosures. 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, 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.

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### 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 two possible entrances one of which had a triangular lintel, an intermural cell and the lower courses of a set of intermural stairs. The broch has been excavated on three separate occasions, the first in 1864 by Samuel Laing, who determined that the mound contained a broch. Sir Francis Tress Barry carried out a larger scale clearance of the interior of the monument in 1893-95, exposing much of what is currently visible. Further excavations were undertaken in 2006 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 a secondary entrance, internal divisions and outbuildings at Keiss indicates this site had a complex development sequence. 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 well-preserved example retaining structural remains, 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.

Keiss 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 exhibits well-preserved structural remains. 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, intramural cells and evidence for an intermural 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

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Historic Environment Scotland <http://www.canmore.org.uk> reference number CANMORE ID 9318 (accessed on 13/04/2015).

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

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