

Scheduled Monument Consent: Report on Handling



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Case information

Reference/Case ID	201601972		
Scheduled Monument	Burghead Well		
Index no	M90044	Grid Ref	NJ110691 311000.0000 869100.0000
Date of Application	13 July 2016	Application Received	13 July 2016
Summary of proposed works	Installation of a second handrail		

1. Summary recommendation

This report recommends that approval be granted without conditions.

2. Background

The monument consists of a rock-cut well of probable late prehistoric or early medieval date. The well comprises a rectangular chamber about 5m square and 3.8m high, with rounded angles, cut out of rock at the base of a crag. It lies 6m below the present ground level. The water is contained within a 3m-square basin bordered by a rock shelf 1.2m wide. The present entrance was constructed after the well was discovered during road improvements in the 19th century.

The well lies within the now-largely destroyed outer defensive line of the Pictish fort at Burghead, which itself probably has Iron Age antecedents, and may be supposed to be the water supply for the fort. However, its elaborate structure may indicate more than a merely utilitarian function, possibly as a religious site. A stone slab with a bull carved on it was found within the well when it was cleared out. This was one of 20 to 30 such bull carvings from the general area, and these were mainly located around the perimeter of the fort.

The well is in the care of Scottish Ministers, the rest of the fort at Burghead is not. The Visitor Risk Assessment has identified that the handrail provision at the site is not up to modern expectations. The steps at the bottom are prone to flooding and are often slippery, presenting a risk to visitors. The additional rail will supply greater access assistance for visitors. Visitors with mobility issues find the existing rail only provides support on one side of the body on decent, and potentially will not be able to use the same rail on ascent. Where the stair is narrow a person with greater disability may

benefit for two rails using both at the same time. Given the awareness of these possibilities HES conservation group seek to upgrade the site provision.

3. Proposals

Consented works - Installation of a handrail.

The proposals comprise:

Fitting a steel bar-cored rope handrail to masonry joints on the side of steps. Steel core to rope will allow fewer fixing points in the masonry (the rope handrail on the other side has six fixing points). The points will be located in existing concrete/cement pointing or into open joints of modern dry stone build. This will require localised rebuilding of the dry wall adding mortar as required to secure fixing points. The current access area was constructed in the 19th C and the fixing points will not compromise original fabric.

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:

Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979

Part 1 Section 2 - Control of works affecting an ancient monument.

Historic Environment Scotland Policy Statement June 2016 (the policy statement)

3.14. A monument is included 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 this policy statement, which 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. (Annex 1 sets out guidance as to how cultural significance and national importance should be determined).

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.

3.19. Extensive intervention will only be allowed where it is clearly necessary to secure the longer-term preservation of the monument, or where it will clearly generate public benefits of national importance which outweigh the impact on the national cultural significance of the monument. Such public benefits could come from, for example, interventions which make public access to scheduled monuments easier, or assist public understanding, or will produce economic benefits once the works are completed.

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 addition of the second rail in the 19th C access stair and the insertion of fixings for this rail in mortar joints will have a very small physical impact on the monument and a minimal impact on its cultural significance. While the applicant is not able to detail the exact location of the proposed fixing points due to the nature of the case, I am content that the method statement covers the procedures which will be followed and these are acceptable and conform to industry standards. Further details of the fixing points is not required for the purposes of the consent.

The works will add significant public benefit, as the additional rail will supply greater access and assistance for visitors.

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

None

d) Conclusion

These works represent additions and alterations to the monument under Part 1.2.2.b. of the Act and as such scheduled monument consent is required.

The works involve a very minor alteration to the wall of the access stair to the site, these stairs are a 19th C addition to the monument. I consider this to represent a

minimal impact on the cultural significance of the monument and to therefore accord with 3.16 of the policy statement.

The method statement indicates that the addition of the rail has been carefully considered and is sensitively designed. The rails fixings will be in existing mortar joints and are therefore reversible. I am content that the detailed description of the works provided in the application complies with 3.20 of the policy statement. I am therefore content that no conditions are necessary.

6. Recommended decision

The works proposed are considered acceptable in meeting the terms of national policy for scheduled monuments, and also accounting for other material considerations.

I recommend consent is **granted, without conditions**.

7. Conditions

None.

8. Approval

Officer	James Bruhn	Date	29/08/2016
Approved by	George Findlater	Date	30/08/2016

Annex A – list of supporting documents

- Burghead well SMC handrail – Photos.
- 453-044-13 A3 SMC new handrail.
- Burghead Well handrail statement.