

Case information

Case ID	300016753
File Reference	AMH/533/2/1
Name of Site	Cairn of Humster, broch 200m N of Northfield
Local Authority	The Highland Council
National Grid Reference	ND 352 484
Designation No. (if any)	SM533
Case Type	Amendment

Received/Start Date	22/04/2015
Decision Date	11/10/2016

1. Decision

The monument was first scheduled in 1939 but an inadequate area was included to protect all of the archaeological remains. The assessment against criteria demonstrates that the monument continues to be of national importance. The decision is to update the entry in the schedule as **Cairn of Humster, broch**.

2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

2.1 Designation Background

This monument was originally scheduled in 1939. There have been no previous amendments to the entry in the schedule.

2.2 Development Proposals

There are no known development proposals affecting this monument.

3. Assessment

3.1 Assessment information

The site was considered for amendment as part of the North 2015 project and was visited on 22 April 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 on the determination of national importance for scheduling.

The 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/>

Having considered the purpose and implications of designating, it has been concluded that scheduling is the most appropriate mechanism to protect the site. Please see Annex A of this document for further information of this assessment.

3.3 Other considerations

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ANNEX A – Assessment Against the Scheduling Criteria

Cairn of Humster, broch

1 Description

The monument is the remains of a broch, a complex and substantial stone-built roundhouse dating from the Iron Age (between about 600 BC and AD 400). It is visible as a low, mostly turf-covered mound bounded by the remains of a ditch and bank on its southwest side. The broch is approximately 45m in diameter and rises to a height of about 1.9m. It survives on agricultural land, at a height of 35m above sea level, 1.3km west of the Caithness coastline.

The scheduled area is circular, measuring 66m 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 all modern boundary features. The monument was first scheduled in 1939, but the scheduling did not include all the archaeological remains and the documentation did not meet current standards; the present amendment rectifies this.

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

2.1 Intrinsic Characteristics

Although reduced by ploughing, the overall structural footprint of the broch appears intact as a low, undulating mound. The mound is likely to reflect an accumulation of collapsed building material over the lower levels of the structure and its flooring, after it was abandoned. There are no records of antiquarian investigation of this site and the collapsed material is therefore likely to seal significant archaeological and environmental evidence from its construction and use. The stone deposited on top of the broch mound is the result of more recent field stone clearance. Although there have been agricultural improvement works undertaken around the site, the area immediately around the broch and its ditch and bank is also likely to contain important features relating to ancillary structures. Taken together, the surviving remains of the broch can help us understand its construction, function, date and duration of occupation, development sequence, and the circumstances of its disuse. There is potential to research the economy, contacts and social status of its occupants.

2.2 Contextual Characteristics

This is one of over 700 brochs known of in Scotland and part of a dense cluster of over 100 in Caithness (between the Dornoch and Pentland Firths). Examples in

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Historic Environment Scotland, Longmore House,
Salisbury Place, Edinburgh, EH9 1SH

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Caithness tend to occupy land along or close to the coastline as well as along the main cross-country routeways. There are eight brochs within 4km of this example giving potential to study its inter-relationship with the local group; the nearest is the broch at Hempriggs House Lodge, 1.3km to the south (scheduled monument reference 883, Canmore ID 8957). There is therefore high potential for comparative study on a local and national scale to better understand the function of these monuments, their role and position in the settlement hierarchy and within the landscape. Such study can enhance our understanding of Iron Age social hierarchy, changing settlement patterns and systems of inheritance.

2.3 Associative Characteristics

There are no known significant associative characteristics which contribute to the site's cultural significance.

3 Purpose and implications of scheduling

Designation as a scheduled monument is 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 of its potential to add significantly to our understanding of prehistoric settlement, society, economy and domestic life. There is high potential that this broch's structural footprint survives undisturbed, retaining buried archaeological and environmental evidence for its use and abandonment, adding considerably to its importance. The potential to compare this broch with others in the vicinity also adds to its significance. 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.

References

Historic Environment Scotland <http://www.canmore.org.uk> CANMORE ID 9639 (accessed on 13/04/2015)

The Highland Council HER reference is MHG1719 (accessed on 13/04/2015).

Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, 1911, Third report and inventory of monuments and constructions in the county of Caithness. London. P.146