



Case Information

Reference/Case ID	300018567		
Scheduled Monument	Urquhart Castle		
Index no	SM90309	Grid ref	NH 53000 28600
Date application validated	14 November 2016		
Summary of proposed works	Installation of drained turf reinforcement to jetty approach path		

1. Summary recommendation

This report recommends that approval for: installation of drained turf reinforcing at an area of turf erosion around the jetty approach path be granted.

2. Background

The monument comprises the remains of a complex medieval castle on a promontory on the shore of Loch Ness.

The N end of the castle is marked by a 16th-century tower which, although lacking much of its south side still rises to its full height. Other buildings in the castle are not as well preserved as this. They include the great hall and kitchens, a chapel, gatehouse, smithy, dovecot and other buildings of unidentified purpose. Excavation at the south end of the castle has shown the presence of a defensive structure dating from the first millennium AD. The landward side of the castle is protected by a ditch formerly crossed by a drawbridge. At the north end of this ditch is a large kiln. The presence of the kiln next to a large, open, gently sloping area suggests that there was a small settlement beyond the walls of the castle.

The scheduled area includes the entire peninsula and an area of the loch running 10m out from the shore. On the landward side the north boundary of the area is defined by a line which runs 30m inland along the fence which starts at the shore approximately 170m northwest of the tower house in the castle. The boundary line then runs due south for approximately 300m where it meets another fence line and runs east back to the shore. Excluded from this are those parts of the modern toilet buildings, sited in the ditch, which are above the present ground level. The area is irregular in shape measuring roughly 300m north-south by 170m and is marked in red on the accompanying map.

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The monument is of national importance because it represents the remains of a highly significant multi-period elite residence in an area of the Highlands that required close control by the Scottish crown and its dependents in the high and late middle ages. It is the eroded area around the approach path to the new (2010) timber jetty on the northeast of the scheduled area that this application relates to. The application is for installation of drained turf reinforcing this area of erosion, which requires excavation to a depth of 175mm across two strips running parallel to the existing path. The strip to the southern edge of the path would be 1m wide and approximately 25.4m in length. The strip to the northern edge of the path would be 2m wide and approximately 29.4m in length. This gives a total area of excavation as approximately 84 sq. m., which is confined to the area of soil erosion. It follows a previous application for excavation of the approach path, timber jetty and approach ramp, which was completed in 2010. It has been submitted by HES Conservation Directorate, with input from HES Commercial and Tourism Directorate's Cultural Resources Team.

The application is accompanied by a copy of the legal scheduling document, an indicative section/plan/method statement, and a Written Scheme of Investigation/Cultural Heritage Assessment.

HES Heritage Management Directorate has undertaken pre-application discussions with the applicant regarding the scope and timing of works, and this application accords with the outcome of those discussions.

3. Proposals

- Excavation to a depth of 175mm the ground to either side of path, in two strips for a total area of approximately 84 sq. m.
- Lay drainage medium strata with reinforcing grid laid over and filled with soil, with grass seed then laid in the grid.

Consented works – installation of drained turf reinforcing at area of turf erosion around jetty approach path. The excavation shall be carried out by a mini-digger with an archaeological watching brief working in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI), until an overall depth of 175mm has been achieved in both strips. As noted above, the first strip to the south of the existing path is 25.4m long by 1m wide, with the second to the north of the existing path being 29.4m long by 2m wide. These two strips total an area of approximately 84 sq. m. The WSI provides for cessation of all works and consultation with HES Heritage Directorate in the event that significant remains are encountered.

A Tensar TriAx 150 geogrid will be laid at the base of the trenches, and a 75mm layer of Type 1 material spread across this. A 50mm layer of sand and soil mix (in the ratio 6:4) will then be spread across the Type 1 layer. Finally, a proprietary grass paving grid (Natpave 25 ny Netion Turf System, or similar) will be overlaid, and then infilled with soil and grass seed to form the finished surface. The finished effect will be a grassy sward with the plastic hexagons of the reinforcing system visible at close range.



Aims – The works are being proposed because the significant movement of visitors from the jetty towards the main areas of the castle site has caused erosion and turf damage, as the existing path is insufficiently wide to accommodate them, and the level of damage will only increase if mitigation works are not carried out. Widening the path would involve a higher level of intervention, and the path would be significantly wider than any other at the site.

Timetable – the work would be undertaken at a time when the site has a lesser number of visitors using the jetty and the surrounding area over this winter.

Personnel – the work will be carried out by HES MCU staff and contractors.

4. Representations received

No third party representations were received.

5. Report

a) Policy considerations

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

Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979

Part 1 Section 2: Control of works affecting scheduled monuments.

Historic Environment Scotland Policy Statement June 2016

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 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.

3.18. 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 proposed works involve the installation of drained turf reinforcing at an area of turf erosion around jetty approach path. This is intended to prevent further erosion of the area flanking the path.

Physical impact – the proposed works would lead to the removal of the ground profile to a depth of 175mm over a total area of approximately 84 sq. m. The general area has seen the works for the existing path upgraded in 2010 as part of the replacement timber jetty scheme – the founds of this path were to a maximum depth of 370mm on the edges immediately beside the proposed excavations. Effectively, the centreline of the area under consideration has already been test excavated.

The single deepest intervention in this area was to a depth of 550mm, closer to the edge of the loch and the replacement jetty. Small excavations at the replacement jetty site in 2008 were also undertaken. No archaeological finds or features were recovered during any of this work. It is therefore not very likely that these excavations would disturb material related to the cultural significance of the monument.

Impact on cultural significance – the area beyond the castle ditch is believed to have had a castletoun at some point in the medieval period, and the visitor centre excavations revealed evidence of 13th to 15th century structures. It is likely that the settlement will also have covered the area between the castle ditch and the site of the visitor centre, but this has not been investigated. At first glance, the presence of a stone corn-drying kiln in the northeastern corner of the castle ditch would suggest that there should be settlement evidence in and around the area of works. However, the lack of archaeological finds and features from previous work in this area suggests that the kiln may be the sole element of the settlement in this part of the site.

Therefore, while it is difficult to be certain about the specific cultural significance of this part of the site, the extent and nature of previous work indicates that the area of the proposed works is not likely to have nationally important remains. The castle has not proven suitable for geophysical survey in the past because of underlying clay layers and geology, so the best method for exploring the area is through excavation. As previous excavation in the area did not reveal any archaeological material, it would therefore be disproportionate to conduct further excavation. A watching brief would be sufficient and reasonable in this case, as it would reveal any finds or features that have not been identified as a result of previous works. The ability of the archaeologist to halt works if substantial remains are encountered, the WSI also provides for further consultation with

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HES Heritage Directorate. This would provide an adequate way in which to avoid impacts on culturally significant remains.

A further consideration would be the potential impact on the appearance of the area of turf reinforcement, and whether this would impact on the cultural significance of the monument. The area already features a timber jetty and ramped access to a whin-surfaced path, along with low interpretation cairn for the adjacent corn-drying kiln. In terms of appearance, the cultural significance of this part of the site is determined by the visibility of the kiln embedded in the outer part of the castle ditch. The other features noted here lie in the background of views towards the kiln from the path and from the castle walls. The addition of the turf reinforcement will not have an impact on the ability to appreciate and understand the relationship of the kiln to the other component parts of the castle.

The turf reinforcement will assist in maintaining the cultural significance of the monument in that it will prevent erosion of the soil at this location, which would inevitably continue until either a depth greater than the proposed works would have been eroded, or a much wider path (with potentially greater impacts) be required.

On balance, the works are unlikely to have an adverse impact on the cultural significance of the scheduled monument. Any residual risk would be mitigated through the archaeological watching brief.

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

No impact on Protected Species and Places considered likely – see Protected Species and Places assessment.

d) Conclusion

The application should be viewed as works as set out in both Part 1 Section 2 of the AMAA Act 1979 and paragraph 3.4 of the policy statement.

The works, comprising installation of drained turf reinforcing at an area of turf erosion around the jetty approach path, are being done to elements of the monument in such a way that they will have minimal impact on the cultural significance of the monument. They do not, therefore, conflict with paragraphs 3.16 and 3.18 of the policy statement.

The application meets paragraph 3.20 because it has demonstrated that the works have been carefully considered, based on good authority, sensitively designed and properly planned.

No conditions are considered necessary, as adequate notification and reporting has been proposed.



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.

It is recommended that consent is **granted without conditions**.

7. Conditions

No conditions have been attached to this decision.

8. Approval

Case officer	John Malcolm	Date	20 December 2016
Approved by	John Raven	Date	20 December 2016

Annex A – list of supporting documents

- Drawing: Scheduled Area Plan Dated 9th September 1997
- Drawing: Location Plan, Plan and Detailed Construction Section Number 485-309-344
- Document: Written Statement of Investigation Dated 4th October 2016 and revised 2nd November 2016