

Case information

Reference/Case ID	201504322		
Scheduled Monument	An Dun, broch, Clachtoll, Stoer		
Index no	M1831	Grid Ref	NC037278 203700.0000 927800.0000
Date of Application	09 October 2015	Application Received	09 October 2015
Summary of proposed works	Structural conservation, archaeological excavation and public presentation.		

1. Summary recommendation

This report recommends approval for the structural conservation, archaeological excavation and public presentation of Clachtoll broch, Assynt.

2. Background

The monument comprises an Iron Age broch, a complex Atlantic round house, and outworks which are considered to be one of the most spectacular Iron Age settlement sites in NW Scotland. It is situated on a low rocky knoll just above the flat rocks fringing the shore at the south end of the Bay of Stoer.

The applicant considers that while overall the broch is in a relatively stable condition, several areas give cause for concern. The proposed works are a continuation of previous small-scale remedial works. The fragile entrance was secured and temporary supporting props are currently in place on the south side of the broch. Historic Environment Scotland and its predecessor body have supported these measures, including grant-aiding the works, and have discussed the proposals with the applicant beforehand. The proposals also form part of a wider project - the Coigach and Assynt Living Landscape Partnership.

The proposed works aim to fully conserve the monument, and to protect it from further loss from coastal erosion and visitor damage. The SMC application is supported by a robust Conservation Strategy which sets out how this will be achieved, and this includes details about the proposed archaeological excavation which hopes to answer specific research questions about the nature of the structure [NB: the Conservation Management Plan (2009) should be read in conjunction with this]. The application also includes proposals to formalise access at the monument by installing a metal structure.

3. Proposals

The proposed works are threefold:

Structural Conservation

A Conservation Strategy setting out how the conservation of the monument will be achieved is included with the application. As part of this, it outlines a series of conservation policies such as identifying the need to minimise interventions in the historic fabric and maximising the retention of historic fabric *in situ* (see paragraphs 22 – 24).

The main areas of concern identified in this are (i) the entrance passage and its first floor abutments, and (ii) the undermining of an area of the outer wall on the south side. As noted above, remedial works to these areas have already been undertaken. In order to carry out the further proposed conservation works a number of interventions are required: removal of debris within the broch; securing the wall, and; providing safe and secure access (as outlined in paragraph 26 of the Conservation Strategy, and further explained in more detail in the following paragraphs).

The applicant proposes a specific plan of action for each area of the broch to be agreed and conditioned with Historic Environment Scotland as part of the SMC application process.

Archaeological Excavation

In order to undertake the conservation of the monument, the applicant argues that it is necessary to carry out certain works which will by their very nature disturb archaeological remains. This includes the excavation of *in situ* deposits and structures, such as the down-taking of the surviving east and south walls, the excavation of the floor/interior and examination of outside the entrance. These are outlined fully in paragraphs 33 to 37.

The monument has not been fully excavated and the applicant contends that the conservation of Clachtoll would allow some key research questions to be answered, such as the chronology of the broch, the context of the surrounding environment and economy and the use of space.

Despite the poor condition of the monument, the applicant argues that Clachtoll has high cultural value and that this could be lost if archaeological information is not retrieved before the monument is eroded further. The archaeological investigations are designed to extract as much as possible from those areas most disturbed by the conservation works, and from any future visitor traffic.

Public Presentation

The proposals also aim to allow visitors to experience the archaeological fieldwork while it is being carried out, public engagement is another important element of the project. The proposals form part of the Coigach and Assynt Living Landscape Partnership, one of its core aims is help link the local community with their landscape.

In order to allow for safe and secure access to the monument and to prevent further damage caused by visitors, a metallic structure made of stainless steel is proposed in the south chamber of the monument. The design concept of the structure was subject to an options appraisal, and the final design is presented in Fig 7 of the Supporting Statement. This is considered to be the most appropriate and least visually intrusive option. Highland Council have confirmed that they are content with this.

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:

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.

3.19. 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 proposals are for the consolidation of a monument which is under threat from coastal erosion, and from visitors to a lesser degree. Up until now, any works to the monument have been remedial. The proposals outlined here are a comprehensive programme to ensure the long-term preservation of the monument.

While there will be an impact on the historic fabric on the monument, this is considered to be justified in light of the advantages in securing the longer-term preservation of Clachtoll, and in generating public benefits. These include the contribution the project can make understanding the Iron Age of Scotland as identified in the Scottish Archaeological Research Framework (ScARF).

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

SNH required a bat survey to be undertaken on the monument before the acceptability of the works could be assessed. The bat survey noted no bats on site, indicating that there would be unlikely to be any impacts.

d) Conclusion

The proposed works can be justified as they are necessary in order to secure the longer-term preservation of Clachtoll which is presently under threat from coastal erosion. The works will also generate public benefits. Therefore, the works comply with Section 3.19 of SHEP.

Furthermore, the changes proposed are carefully considered and the proposed metal structure is reversible, meaning that they are justified against Section 3.20 of the SHEP.

However, as the Conservation Statement includes only general principles rather than specific details about the exact location and extent of consolidation and archaeological excavation, a related condition has therefore been recommended.

6. Recommended decision

Subject to compliance with the schedule of conditions, 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 subject to the conditions detailed below.**

7. Conditions

1. No works shall begin on-site, until the following documents have been received and approved in writing by Historic Environment Scotland: 1) drawings confirming the location, extent and type of works proposed, and; 2) an informed justification for the interventions that are being proposed.

Reason: to ensure that any interventions are the minimum necessary, and to maintain a record of changes to the monument.

2. At least two weeks before any works begin on site, the applicant shall inform Historic Environment Scotland and the local authority archaeologist in writing of the likely timetable of works. Any changes to that timetable shall also be notified to both bodies.

Reason: to enable a representative of Historic Environment Scotland to have the opportunity to inspect the work for which consent is granted, and to inform the local authority archaeological service of the proposed works.

3. Should any unexpected archaeological deposits which were not anticipated in the project design be discovered during excavation, the applicant shall not disturb them without the prior written consultation and prior written agreement from Historic Environment Scotland.

Reason: to ensure that any unexpected archaeological discoveries made during excavation are adequately recorded and treated in any post-excavation work.

4. Within two weeks of the completion of all works, the monument will be restored to its original contours prior to the recent works, with any topsoil reinstated. The applicant shall inform Historic Environment Scotland of the completion of this in writing and submit photographs showing the reinstated monument.

Reason: to ensure that the site is returned to a condition matching that before the works were undertaken, and to enable a representative of Historic Environment Scotland to have the opportunity to inspect the completed work.

5. Within three months of the end of fieldwork, the applicant shall submit to Historic Environment Scotland a single copy of the Data Structure Report. This should also be sent to the National Monument Record of Scotland, as well as those listed in the project design.

Reason: to make the immediate results of the work widely available.

6. Within three months of the end of fieldwork, the applicant shall submit to Historic Environment Scotland a Project Design for post-excavation and publication.

Reason: to enable Historic Environment Scotland to monitor the progress of the work for which consent has been granted, and to ensure that provision is made for the curation and publication of any archaeological findings.

8. Approval

Officer	Nicola Hall	Date	05/11/2015
Approved by	John Raven	Date	19/11/2015

Annex A – list of supporting documents

Conservation Strategy and Research Design (AOC 60073)
Conservation Management Plan (AOC 20867)
HC Planning Pre-application advice
Summary of community consultations undertaken 2014
Architectural Report (CGLA)