

Case information

Reference/Case ID	201504793		
Scheduled Monument	Stirling Castle		
Index no	M90291	Grid Ref	NS788941 278800.0000 694100.0000
Date of Application	19 October 2015	Application Received	29 October 2015
Summary of proposed works	Thinning of squirrel damaged, poor, suppressed, co-dominant trees and self-sown poorly formed thickets		

1. Summary recommendation

This report recommends that approval for the thinning of squirrel damaged, poor, suppressed, co-dominant trees and self-sown poorly formed thickets be granted without conditions.

2. Background

The monument comprises Stirling Castle and its immediate setting. Stirling Castle is a strongly-fortified royal castle occupying a volcanic outcrop which commands the upper Forth valley. The defences define three main enclosures: the outer defences (on the main line of approach), the main enclosure (at the summit of the rock) and the nether bailey (to the N). The principal buildings for royal occupation at the summit of the rock form a square enclosed by the King's Old Building, the Great Hall, the Chapel Royal and the Palace.

Below the castle rock to the SW lies the surviving physical upstanding remains of part of the royal gardens of Stirling Castle, as remodelled in 1628-9 for the homecoming of Charles I in 1633 and known as the Kings Knot. Between the Kings Knot and Stirling Castle lie the woodlands of Back Walk, which occupy the western slopes of the castle rock. These woodlands contain a network of paths and terraces that form part of the complex of royal gardens, and also contain various midden deposits associated with the use and occupation of the castle. These woodlands are the subject of this application.

This work is being undertaken not only in order to enhance visitor experience of popular walks through this woodland, which will expose significant rock features throughout the woodland and open up views of the castle walls, but also as part of responsible forestry management; thinning will increase light levels available on the woodland floor, which will increase the understorey growth which in turn will help stabilise steeper soils. This work will benefit the long term preservation of the monument in that it will reduce the tree cover (and thus remove a source of damage to archaeological deposits through root growth) whilst at the same time encouraging less damaging understorey growth which will help stabilise the soil, and it will also be of public benefit as it will enhance the visitor experience of a less-seen aspect of Stirling Castle.

HS/HES visited the monument in 2014 to discuss an earlier phase of the proposed felling with the applicant. HS/HES has since undertaken pre-application discussions with the applicant regarding the approach to this second phase of works, and this application accords with the outcome of these discussions.

The applicant submitted additional information pertaining to the SMC application, namely that the applicant will provide HES with a timetable for works at least 1 week prior to commencement of works, and will notify HES within 2 weeks of completion of works on site.

3. Proposals

Consented works – thinning of squirrel damaged, poor, suppressed, co-dominant trees and self-sown poorly formed thickets.

The proposals comprise:

- Thinning of thickets in Cpt 3a.
- Crown reducing mature sycamore and thinning up to 25% of stocking density in Cpts 3b, 4a, and 4b.
- Cutting and spraying of regeneration below castle walls in Cpts 3b and 4b.
- All felling will be sectional, with timber extracted by winch to main paths and then onwards outwith scheduled area by low impact small alpine tractor, and all stumps will be treated with an appropriate herbicide to prevent regeneration.

4. Representations received

No third party 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.

Part 1 Section 2 (3) – authorises works where Scottish Ministers or Historic Environment Scotland Have granted consent (scheduled monument consent) for the execution of the works where the works are executed in accordance with the terms of the consent and of any conditions attached to the consent.

The Scottish Historic Environment Policy

3.14. Scottish Ministers include a monument 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 SHEP, 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 works involve the thinning of squirrel damaged, poor, suppressed, co-dominant trees and self-sown poorly formed thickets in woodland around the castle rock. The physical impact of these works on the preservation of the monument will be minimal; the operation to remove the trees has been designed so that all felling is sectional, with cut timber then being extracted by winch to main paths and then onwards

outwith scheduled area by low impact small alpine tractor, and all stumps will be treated with an appropriate herbicide to prevent regeneration. HES will be notified of the timetable for works at least 1 week prior to commencement of works, and will be notified within 2 weeks of completion of works on site.

The existing growth of the trees within the scheduled area is likely to have already disturbed buried archaeological deposits that might be present; removing the trees now will prevent further disturbance as the trees grow bigger, and will enable less damaging understorey growth to establish which will help stabilise the steep soils.

It is therefore to the benefit of the long term preservation of the monument that the thinning is undertaken now, and I consider that the prescribed methodology will not have an impact on the monument.

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

None outstanding. A bat survey was undertaken in 2014 and noted foraging Soprano and Common Pipistrelle bats present in very low numbers scattered along the western flank of the hill, but the survey noted that this was not an ecological constraint for the proposed tree works. The current works are an extension of the 2014 works, and take full consideration of the residual potential of bats being found.

d) Conclusion

The proposed works will be of benefit to the long term preservation of the monument. They will result in the removal of trees and thickets that will likely have been causing damage to archaeological deposits, and the methodology for removal is such that the operation to remove the trees will not cause additional damage or result in additional intervention to archaeological deposits.

The works can therefore be considered as the minimum level of intervention that is consistent with conserving what is culturally significant in a monument, and thus compliant with SHEP 3.16.

The works are also being undertaken at a part of the scheduled monument which contains a network of paths and terraces that form part of the complex of royal gardens, and also contains various midden deposits associated with the use and occupation of the castle, and as such the potential for impact on areas of the monument of greater cultural significance is low, thus making the application compliant with SHEP 3.18.

The works are part of wider positive woodland management works, have been designed to have a low impact on the scheduled monument, and are well planned, and as such the application is compliant with SHEP 3.20.

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

No conditions required.

8. Approval

Officer	Oliver Lewis	Date	08/12/2015
Approved by	George Findlater	Date	08/12/2015

Annex A – list of supporting documents

- Bat survey report – Acorna Associates
- Thinning licence approval and map
- Operations map – Back Walk and Gowan Hill Ops 2015
- Method statement – TD Trees Ltd
- Email from Fiona Melville to Oliver Lewis dated 02 December 2015 regarding notifying HES of the timetable, commencement, and completion of works on site.