

Case information

Reference/Case ID	201505589		
Scheduled Monument	Auld Kirk, ring cairn 150m E of Ardgathen		
Index no	M6	Grid Ref	NJ565163 356500.0000 816300.0000
Date of Application	25 November 2015	Application Received	30 November 2015
Summary of proposed works	Felling of mature Beech Tree growing on N edge of cairn		

1. Summary recommendation

This report recommends approval of the proposed works without conditions.

2. Background

The monument is a prehistoric burial and ritual monument comprising a circular stone bank 3-3.5m wide and up to 0.75m high enclosing a central area 4m across. A gap in the bank on the SSE side may represent an original entrance. Ring cairns date from the Bronze Age and often represent the final stage of a long history of ritual and burial activity on a site. In the case of Auld Kirk ring cairn, this history of reuse may have continued into the early medieval period with a local tradition that the site was used for early Christian worship.

The cultural significance of the monument relates to its characteristics as a well-preserved example of a comparatively rare form of field monument, and its potential to contain archaeological deposits relating to its construction and use as a funerary and ritual site.

The monument was visited by the HES Field Officer on 17 September 2015, when the poor condition of a lone beech tree growing within the cairn was noted. Subsequent discussions with the applicant have led to the proposals outlined in this application. Historic Environment Scotland has offered grant aid to assist with the costs of the works covered by this application with the caveat that the grant offer is subject to the granting of scheduled monument consent.

3. Proposals

The works comprise the controlled felling of a single beech tree. The upstanding tree stump (approximately 0.5m high) will be left in situ to rot naturally. Felled timber will be removed from the scheduled area.

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.

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.

3.15. Monuments are subject to decay and the threat of destruction, from natural and human causes. Conservation work is normally needed to prolong the life of a monument, but there is a risk that this can be so invasive that it irreversibly modifies the monument's character and affects the special interest or features that made the monument important in the first place.

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.

b) Assessment

The works will involve the felling and removal of a mature beech tree which stands within the ring cairn. The application contains evidence that the tree is dying and is at risk of eventual breakage or collapse. Falling timber from such a collapse would pose a significant threat to the upstanding elements of the cairn.

The application describes the techniques to be used to mitigate the potential impact of the works on the monument; the tree will be cut in a manner that should allow it to fall without impacting on the upstanding elements of the monument, and straw bales will also be used to cushion the fall and protect upstanding features.

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

None.

d) Conclusion

The proposed works will be of benefit to the long term preservation of the monument. The tree poses a significant risk to the fabric of the cairn, which can only be mitigated by its removal. The works can, therefore, be considered as the minimum level of intervention consistent with conserving what is culturally significant in a monument, complying with SHEP 3.16.

Although not an extensive intervention to the archaeological remains themselves, the works are also clearly necessary to secure the longer-term preservation of the monument, in accordance with SHEP 3.19.

The proposals contain suitable mitigation measures to protect the monument from accidental damage during the felling operation. I therefore do not consider any conditions to be necessary in this case.

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	Deirdre Cameron	Date	12/01/2016
Approved by	George Findlater	Date	14/01/2016

Annex A – list of supporting documents

1. Location map
2. Image of tree growing on cairn