

Case information

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| Reference/Case ID | 201507123 | | |
| Scheduled Monument | St Mary's Abbey, Iona, monastic settlement | | |
| Index no | M12968 | Grid Ref | NM286245 128600.0000 724500.0000 |
| Date of Application | 10 February 2016 | Application Received | 16 February 2016 |
| Summary of proposed works | Creation of a new gateway through a field dyke, rebuilding of the dyke terminal, and insertion of strainer posts (Retrospective) | | |

1. Summary recommendation

This report recommends that consent be granted.

2. Background

The monument comprises the remains of the large early historic monastic settlement founded by St Columba in AD 563, St Martin's Cross, and parts of medieval buildings associated with the Benedictine Abbey of St Mary founded around AD 1200. Parts of the bank and ditch that surrounded the monastic settlement are visible as upstanding features, particularly on the west side of the monument. Elsewhere, archaeological excavations and geophysical surveys demonstrate that complex archaeological remains of the monastic settlement survive below ground.

The applicant is seeking retrospective consent for works undertaken between August and November 2015. At that time, the applicant's contractors were laying a new outfall pipe through the west part of the scheduled monument, for which the applicant had scheduled monument consent (SMC). However, the contractor's staff made an opening in the existing field dyke, rebuilt the dyke terminal and adapted the fencing without SMC. Historic Environment Scotland investigated these unauthorised works and suggested that an application for scheduled monument consent would be appropriate.

3. Proposals

Consented works

Creation of a new gateway through a field dyke, rebuilding of the dyke terminal, and insertion of strainer posts (Retrospective)

Description of works

The west end of an existing dry stone field dyke was demolished. The west end of the wall stub was then rebuilt to create an opening, approximately 5m wide, and strainer posts were inserted to adapt the existing post and wire fencing to accommodate the new opening in the field boundary.

4. Representations received

No representations have been received.

5. Report

a) Policy considerations

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

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AMAAA 1979, Part 1 Section 2:
control of works affecting an ancient monument.

The Scottish Historic Environment Policy (2011):

3.4. Scheduled monument consent is required for any works that would demolish, destroy, damage, remove, repair, alter or add to the monument or to carry out any flooding or tipping on the monument. It is a criminal offence to carry out any of these works without consent.

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 have involved demolition of part of a modern field dyke, rebuilding the dyke terminal and insertion of strainer posts. The dyke itself is excluded from the scheduled monument in the scheduling document, but rebuilding of the dyke terminal and insertion of strainer posts are works that require scheduled monument consent. The new gateway lies just within the scheduled area, extending from the south boundary of the scheduled area to a point about 5m to the north.

The data structure report on the archaeological evaluation conducted in advance of laying of the overflow pipe (Guard Archaeology Project 3790) provides information on the presence/absence of buried archaeological remains in the immediate vicinity of the new gateway. The evaluation comprised excavation of a trench 1.5m wide that examined ground on either side of the newly formed gateway. The only deposits encountered in the vicinity of the gateway comprised topsoil and sand/gravel subsoil. The nearest archaeological features detected on the line of the outflow pipe comprised burnt spreads located about 12m west and 17m east of the gateway. It therefore seems unlikely that formation of the gateway has disturbed any archaeological remains.

The new gateway was intended to give access to the lower field in the south-east corner of the scheduled monument. At present, access to this field has to be taken point some 170m to the north, much closer to the core of the early historic and medieval monasteries, in an area of higher archaeological potential. Access is complicated at the northern access point by open drains and a walkway, and use of agricultural machinery here has potential to impede access to the area for visitors. Therefore, on archaeological and visitor access grounds, it seems preferable for agricultural access to the lower field to be taken via the newly formed gateway at the periphery of the scheduled monument.

The location of the new gateway close to the edge of the scheduled area, and the lack of buried remains identified in the archaeological evaluation mean that it is very unlikely that installation of the gateway has had an adverse impact on the cultural significance of the monument. There are good grounds for recommending granting of consent and retention of the gateway.

Had consent been applied for prior to the works taking place, it is likely that an archaeological watching brief would have been recommended. However, retrospective excavation is unlikely to achieve results which illuminate our understanding of the monument. Furthermore, it would require dismantling the fence and wall, the replacement of which would be likely to cause further damage in order

to provide sufficient foundations and support. Consequently, applying archaeological mitigation seems unnecessary.

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

The applicant has indicated the works may affect a Special Area of Conservation, but the SNH sitelink webpage confirms there is no SAC in the vicinity. The application site does not lie close to any SSSI or SPA designation. National Biodiversity Network GIS data sets indicate no evidence for Protected Species in the relevant 100m grid squares.

d) Conclusion

The works have involved shallow ground disturbance to rebuild the dyke terminal and deeper, localised disturbance to insert strainer posts. However, evaluation trenching has indicated no archaeological remains in the immediate vicinity and it is very unlikely that the works have had a significant adverse effect on the cultural significance of the monument. The works may therefore comply with policy at SHEP para 3.18. The proposals should allow future agricultural access to be taken to the south-east field in a less sensitive location than the existing access, and should avoid accidental ground disturbance close to the core of the site that could affect buried remains and impair access for visitors. The works can therefore be regarded as being in accordance with policy at SHEP para 3.16, which notes that interventions should normally be the minimum consistent with conserving what is culturally significant in a monument.

6. Recommended decision

The works are considered acceptable in meeting the terms of national policy for scheduled monuments, and also accounting for other material considerations.

7. Conditions

Granted without conditions.

8. Approval

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| Officer | Richard Heawood | Date | 19/02/2016 |
| Approved by | John Raven | Date | 22/02/2016 |

Annex A – list of supporting documents

Site plan
Photo of completed gate