

Case information

Reference/Case ID	201506651		
Scheduled Monument	Balnagask motte, Baxter Place, Aberdeen		
Index no	M10403	Grid Ref	NJ957051 395700.0000 805100.0000
Date of Application	21 January 2016	Application Received	22 January 2016
Summary of proposed works	Excavation of two trial pits adjacent to retaining boundary wall		

1. Summary recommendation

This report recommends that approval for the excavation of two trial pits adjacent to retaining boundary wall be granted with conditions.

2. Background

The monument comprises the remains of a probable motte which was likely adapted from a natural knoll. It stands on high ground in Torry, and later formed a garden feature of the nearby Balnagask House (now demolished) with trees and a curving path being introduced. Its N, NE, and to a lesser degree E sides have been cut back by a few metres and a retaining wall installed when Baxter Place was built. The monument has a number of mature trees on it, and is largely grassed over.

The retaining wall is not scheduled, but the ground it retains is. The wall is bowing and rotating in several places on the N and NE boundaries of the monument, and there is a concern that it could collapse onto the adjacent pavement. The applicant has securely fenced off and propped the wall, but a long term solution is required so that the pavement can be reopened and the temporary works removed.

HS/HES has undertaken pre-application discussions with the applicant regarding the approach to resolving the unstable retaining boundary wall over the past couple of years, and a SMC has previously been granted for a ground pinning solution which is now considered unsuitable (following further investigations). HES visited the monument in 2016 and met with the applicant to discuss works, and this application accords with the outcome of those discussions.

The intention of the trial pits is to establish where archaeological deposits lie in relation to the retaining wall, as a possible solution is a reduction in the height of the ground behind the wall, thus allowing the wall to be reduced in height as well (which mitigates the impact of the bowing and rotation). Although unclear in the SMC application, the applicant has since confirmed that this application is for the trial pits only; any subsequent ground reduction works would be subject to a separate SMC application.

3. Proposals

Consented works - Excavation of two trial pits adjacent to retaining boundary wall.

The proposals comprise:

- Excavation of two trial pits measuring 2m by 1m by up to 1.2m in depth or the first archaeological layer encountered, whichever comes sooner.

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.

Part 1 Section 2 (4) – allows consent to be granted with conditions.

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.

3.22. Where consent for the range of works set out in paragraph 3.4 is granted, conditions are normally applied to ensure the works are undertaken in an appropriate manner. Common requirements are:

- f. that an appropriate level of record is made before, during and after any work and deposited in local and national archives, and, where appropriate, published;
- h. that any archaeological excavation or other intrusive investigation should be based upon a detailed research strategy, with adequate resources, using appropriately skilled and experienced archaeologists with a satisfactory record of the completion and publication of projects (see Note 3.10); and,
- i. that the design, planning and execution of works on scheduled monuments are undertaken by people with appropriate professional and craft qualifications, skills and experience.

b) Assessment

The works involve the excavation of two trial pits measuring 2m by 1m by up to 1.2m in depth or the first archaeological layer encountered, whichever comes sooner. The trial pits are located immediately adjacent to the retaining boundary wall on the N and NE side of the monument, and the purpose of the trial pits is to see where archaeological layers are located in relation to the retaining boundary wall.

There will be a minor physical impact on the monument through the digging of the two test pits, although as the purpose of the test pits is to establish where the first archaeological layer reached lies in relation to the retaining wall then by their very nature the impact of the test pits on surviving archaeological deposits will be minimal.

The working assumption is that a proportion of ground behind the retaining wall is backfilled redeposited material. As such, the probable impact of these works on the cultural significance of the monument is low, as deposits of cultural significance are

likely to have already have been disturbed when the retaining wall was built. Works in this area are therefore likely to have less impact than elsewhere within the scheduled area.

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

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

d) Conclusion

The proposed works will be of benefit to the long term preservation of the monument as they will inform the subsequent stabilisation of the retaining boundary wall; if the wall were to fail then archaeological deposits could become vulnerable to slumping and erosion. The excavation of the trial pits will stop at the first archaeological layer encountered, and as such the physical impact on the monument will be minor. 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 done to elements of the monument in such a way that their impact on the cultural significance of the monument is minor, and as such the application is compliant with SHEP 3.18.

The works are part of an ongoing scheme for stabilising the retaining boundary wall, and the wider scheme has been developed out of an options appraisal. As such, the works are designed in such a way as to be of minimal impact, are well planned with identified funding, and as such the application is compliant with SHEP 3.20.

The works require to be undertaken by an archaeological contractor. No written scheme of investigation has been provided as part of the application, so this will need to be conditioned. This will enable the application to be compliant with SHEP 3.22.

Condition 1 is to ensure that a WSI is agreed prior to works commencing, and that therefore the archaeological works are undertaken and reported to a satisfactory standard.

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 condition detailed below.**

7. Conditions

1. No works associated with the excavation of the trial pits shall take place until the applicant has submitted to, and had approved in writing by Historic Environment Scotland a written scheme of investigation (WSI) to cover the archaeological works. This WSI should include a timetable for the works as well as an updated trench location plan to show at least one of the trial pits orientated so that the short side is adjacent to the retaining wall and the long side runs towards the motte.

Reason: to ensure that archaeological information is recovered and recorded to a satisfactory standard.

8. Approval

Officer	Oliver Lewis	Date	15/03/2016
Approved by	George Findlater	Date	17/03/2016

Annex A – list of supporting documents

- Site location plan – H1135.01 rev A
- Email from Colin Doig of Aberdeen City Council to Oliver Lewis of HES dated 15 March 2016 confirming that the application is for trial pits only, and that any further work would be subject to a separate application.