

Case information

Reference/Case ID	201506896		
Scheduled Monument	Whithorn Priory, monastic settlement and priory		
Index no	M12992	Grid Ref	NX444403 244400.0000 540300.0000
Date of Application	01 February 2016	Application Received	02 February 2016
Summary of proposed works	Installation of interpretation board on relocated/altered or replacement low stone plinth in new position, making good at previous location.		

1. Summary recommendation

This report recommends that the application be approved subject to conditions.

2. Background

Whithorn Priory is the remains of an early medieval monastery and later Premonstratensian monastic house. The remains include the standing nave and crypts of the 13th-century monastic church as well as those of the earlier settlement. The site is a Property in Care of Scottish Ministers and maintained by Historic Environment Scotland.

The main interpretation on first entering the churchyard is adjacent to the standing sections of the nave. This interpretation is on a polyvinyl board affixed to a stone plinth set in a shallow concrete foundation. The plinth sits atop the raised ground beside the main access path towards the core areas of the site. It has been noted that this board is at an awkward height for all-abilities users (especially children, those of smaller stature, and wheelchair users). The board is also adjacent to a sloping section of path, which creates issues for those with mobility difficulties. Finally, the present location is some distance into the site so does not facilitate initial orientation of visitors.

Pre-application discussions have taken place at the site in 2012, as well as with internal stakeholders at a separate meeting in 2015. An area of low archaeological sensitivity was identified as minimising the risk to culturally important remains. An

email covering Heritage Management Directorate's pre-application Scheduled Monument Consent advice was sent in the aftermath of that meeting.

3. Proposals

Installation of interpretation board on relocated/alterd or replacement low stone plinth in new position, making good at previous location.

4. Representations received

Dumfries & Galloway Council (as owners of the churchyard) have raised no objections to the proposal.

5. Report

a) Policy considerations

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

AMAAA 1979

Part 1 Section 2, and especially 2 (1), 2(4) and 2 (5a)

Scottish Historic Environment Policy (SHEP)

Chapter 3 applies, and particularly paragraph 3.16:

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.

b) Assessment

Overview

This application proposes to relocate the existing stone plinth to a location beside the entrance gate which has a low risk of archaeological sensitivity, or to erect a new plinth at that same location. As the condition of the existing plinth cannot be established until it is lifted from its concrete foundation, the plinth may crack or shatter during or after removal, this has meant that the applicant cannot make a firm determination on which method would be followed.

After lifting the existing plinth location would then have the concrete foundation partly levelled and then backfilled with soil and covered in turf to match the profile of the surrounding ground.

The removal of the existing plinth will be carried out with hand tools, which may involve damage to the plinth but not to underlying archaeological remains. If it is

undamaged, the existing plinth will be reused. If the plinth is damaged, a new stone plinth would be required for the proposed location. It is proposed that any replacement would be slightly smaller in length, width and depth.

The applicant has prepared two drawings to cover both possible options. The replacement plinth is a standardised one of a slightly smaller size than the existing plinth, so the implications of reuse has a slightly greater archaeological footprint.

The archaeological impacts of removal of the existing plinth

The existing plinth will be removed by hand and the concrete foundation chipped away and ground out with hand tools. If soil is encountered at a depth shallower than 100mm, work will stop and the trench would be covered with replacement turf. If (as appears likely) the foundation is deeper than 150mm, it will be removed to that depth and the remainder left in situ. The trench would then be backfilled and replacement turf used to cover the hole. In both cases, only modern foundation material would be disturbed and the impact on nationally important archaeology would be negligible. Set against SHEP 3.16 as outlined above, this element of the work appears to be consistent with that policy.

The archaeological impacts from the creation of a new plinth location

An excavation trench up to 990 by 600 mm (0.594m²) would be excavated under archaeological supervision. The trench for a new plinth would be of a slightly lesser size, at 950 by 575 mm (0.546m²).

The chosen location would facilitate compliance with reasonable requirements for interpretation that would be visible to all visitors. The location is slightly sloping from north downwards to south, with the proposed plinth oriented northwest-southeast. This would mean that the foundation trench for the new plinth would be 100mm deep in the southeast end, and being up to 150mm deep at the northwest end. This is at a much lesser depth than intact burials are likely to be encountered. However, there is a risk that sensitive disarticulated human remains in the topsoil would be encountered during excavation work.

Kirkdale Archaeology have provided a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI), which sets out the level of monitoring and recording. This will include their presence during the excavation stage, their ability to stop all works while recording, sampling and preliminary reporting works are carried out, including reporting and finds/samples/post-excavation reporting being carried out. The proposed WSI is consistent with expected professional requirements. If human remains or significant archaeological information is encountered, the archaeological work would be sufficient to mitigate impacts.

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

As the application site lies directly adjacent to a well-visited tarmac path in a churchyard, the presence of Protected Species is highly unlikely.

While not directly referred to in the application, the applicant's archaeologist has undertaken to comply with policies that are set out in *The Treatment of Human Remains in Archaeology* (Historic Scotland Operational Policy Paper 5). This applies to the treatment of potential disarticulated human remains that may be identified during archaeological works in the new plinth location.

d) Conclusion

The works will have a potential impact on buried remains and finds within the topsoil. Any human remains are overwhelmingly likely to be disarticulated in nature. A Written Scheme of Investigation for an archaeological watching brief provides for recording, halting of works, sampling and reporting of any remains, finds or features encountered. The work is required to make the monument more accessible to all elements of the visiting public, and would have a minimal impact on the cultural significance of the monument. The works do not therefore conflict with para 3.16 of SHEP.

If significant remains were to be encountered, the application provides that Heritage Management Directorate would be asked to consider how to proceed, but no notification procedure is included. It is therefore recommended that a condition be inserted so that a works timetable and completion date should be submitted.

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 therefore recommend that consent is **granted, subject to the condition detailed below.**

7. Conditions

1. Not less than two weeks prior to excavation works commencing on site, a timetable of works including an intended completion date shall be submitted to Historic Environment Scotland. Any alteration to the timetable shall also be submitted to the Historic Environment Scotland.

Reason: to ensure that Historic Environment Scotland is able to inspect the works for which consent is granted.

8. Approval

Officer	John Malcolm	Date	15/03/2016
Approved by	John Raven	Date	15/03/2016

Annex A – list of supporting documents

- 1) Drawing (A3): New Interpretation Board to Graveyard: Location Plan (12992-15015-001A)
- 2) Drawing (A3): New Interpretation Board to Graveyard: Location Plan & Details – Alt Plinth Design (12992-151015-002)
- 3) Drawing (A4) Location Plan (dated 23/10/2015)
- 4) Document: Signage schedule – Signage within Local Authority Managed Graveyard (dated 01/02/2016)
- 5) SectionA6 Continuation Sheet (dated 01/02/2016)
- 6) Document: WSI Archaeological Recording Signage Installation (dated 09/10/2015)
- 7) Dumfries & Galloway Council/HS Cultural Heritage Team e-mail exchange (03/08/2015 & 10/07/2015)