

Case information

Reference/Case ID	201508343		
Scheduled Monument	Dunollie Castle		
Index no	M293	Grid Ref	NM852314 185200.0000 731400.0000
Date of Application	29 March 2016	Application Received	07 April 2016
Summary of proposed works	Additional works to improve access to heritage, public safety and security		

1. Summary recommendation

This report recommends approval for a suite of works to consolidate the castle, provide interpretation and improve security for public safety.

2. Background

Dunollie Castle consist of the remains of a large tower and enclosure of probable fifteenth-century date built on top of the remains of an early medieval royal capital and possibly an earthwork fortification dating to the Wars of Independence. Initially the centre of the early medieval Dalriadic kingdom of Loarn, the site was later appropriated by the MacDougal lordship, becoming their main centre after disastrously backing the Comyn bid for the Scottish crown and losing Dunstaffnage and their overlordship of Lorn as a result. It commands the harbourage in Oban bay and the maritime routeways through the Inner Hebrides and the mouth of Loch Etive, being best and most appreciated today from ferries to and from Oban. The tower is an impressive and dominating structure, constructed using Irish building techniques.

Consolidation undertaken in the Victorian era and the 1930s is now beginning to fail. Ivy has also inundated the structure. Consequently, the integrity of the building is threatened and there is a problem with falls of stonework from high level. In light of these concerns public access has been withdrawn and the castle no longer used for events. Historic Scotland has been in discussions with the owner for some time about how to redress these concerns. Grant was given to consolidate the wallheads and SMC has previously been granted for a full consolidation scheme. With the support of a grant from HES and the HLF the works covered by the previous SMC

started earlier this year. Vegetation has been removed and most of the masonry consolidated on the southwest and southeast outer wall faces.

High level access has identified a number of works which are required in addition to those covered by the previous SMC. As the previous SMC was granted by Scottish Ministers, through HS, it was thought that it might be beneficial to update and supersede these works with a new application, to be managed by HES.

As a result of greater progress being made, quicker than anticipated, and as a result of public access and interpretation requirements necessitated in order to gain the HLF grant, it was thought necessary to bring forward a suite of additional related works.

3. Proposals

The proposed works include:

1. Revised consolidation of southwest elevation.
2. Revised consolidation of southeast elevation.
3. Consolidation of internal stair corner.
4. Installation of supports to tower entrance.
5. Installation of supports to enclosure entrance.
6. Installation of yett in enclosure entrance.
7. Installation of rope handrail to internal stair.
8. Installation of latch to internal stair.
9. Re-examination of earlier excavations.
10. Backfilling of earlier excavation trench.
11. Installation of 4 x information boards.

The majority of the consolidation works can be characterised as a non-intrusive masonry repair – using rake, tamp and point approach, using a suitable lime mortar. In some cases loose, unsupported masonry will be provided by new stonework corbelled from more stable masonry underneath. Large areas of exposed core work will be rough raked and no new facing material will be introduced.

The proposals to provide support above the opening into the tower are unclear. These were the subject of pre-application discussion and a final decision was covered by a condition of the previous SMC. However, no further detail has been provided. Nor have details been provided for the proposed support to the corner of the inner stair.

The lintel stones and other stone work above the enclosure entrance are unsafe but insufficient detail has been provided regarding how these are to be consolidated. Various methods were discussed at pre-application stage, including a mix of support bars inserted into soffits in the stone work and pinning back into the masonry (which was the preferred option), to significant up-building/corbeling to provide support from underneath.

The yett will be fixed into joints and so will have little direct impact on the masonry. Any direct impacts could, however, be mitigated further by relocating the yett so that the fixings are inserted into twentieth century stonework and consolidation closer to the inner face. The yett has been proposed in order to prevent uncontrolled public access. One of the main reasons why the project has received funding is to provide public access, so it is not intended to prevent full access in the long term, just limit it to when it can be monitored and the visiting public kept safe.

The current proposals are to restrict public access to the ground floor vault, until the inner tower interior has been consolidated and safe access provided. It is therefore proposed to hang a new gate on existing hinges. The gate will not require SMC but the gate's closing will have to be secured using a new latch which will. The applicant hopes to provide temporary access to the first floor, during guided tours, until such time as the interior has been made safe. A rope handrail has therefore been proposed. The latch and handrail fittings will be fixed into masonry joints.

A long trench has previously been excavated down the centre of the enclosure. It is possible this was dug to provide drainage, as an outlet through the enclosure wall is visible along the same alignment. However, it is also possible this was excavated to expose the outer wall facings of some of the structures built within the enclosure. No record of the excavations survives. Any drainage provided no longer functions and the exposed masonry is largely obscured by vegetation. The trench is now considered to pose a health and safety, trip hazard to castle visitors. It is therefore proposed to work with community volunteers, under strict archaeological supervision, to expose and record the trench sides and wall footings, and then largely backfill but leave the wall tops exposed, so that the line of the buildings can still be appreciated.

Three of the interpretation boards, all within the castle enclosure, will be placed on stones placed directly on the ground surface and will not require any excavation. The fourth will be fixed to the masonry outside the castle entrance.

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:

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.

3.17. As each monument will require treatment specific to its individual nature, characteristics, significance and needs, any proposed change to it must be fully and explicitly justified.

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.

b) Assessment

Whilst visibility of some historic masonry and mortar work will be obscured the character of the masonry will be preserved and its structural integrity preserved in the long term. This will, therefore, be a significant benefit to the monument.

The proposed supports above the tower entrance formed part of the previous SMC. There was some disagreement of their necessity at that time, and they were covered by a condition to the granting of that SMC. Without further clarification it is not possible to assess the need or potential impact of what is being proposed. However, during pre-application discussions it was suggested that this should be discussed further and incorporated into this SMC application in order that the works be agreed and any conditioned discharged by HES. It should be possible to reach an agreement on this item so it is proposed to attach a condition to enable further discussion.

No details have been provided to explain what is being proposed to consolidate the corner of the inner stair. This is a significant structural weak point where the upper masonry relies on the support of masonry only one stone thick and resting on a stairway which has lost its stairs. The problem here has been highlighted during previous visits but no solution proposed. Without details it is not possible to assess this item. A suspensive condition has been presented below to allow further discussion and the provision of details.

The details of the supports above the enclosure entrance are unclear and what has been provided does not reflect the trajectory of pre-application discussions. Further discussion is required in order to clarify what is proposed, its necessity and how any impacts can be mitigated. It is anticipated that agreement can be reached, so a suspensive condition has been added.

Installation of a yett in the location proposed would have a limited impact on the historic masonry, as fixings would be placed into joints. However, any impacts could be mitigated further by relocating this to an area of twentieth-century consolidation placed nearer the interior. This location had been agreed during pre-application discussions and it is not clear why this new location has been proposed. A suspensive condition has been appended to enable further discussion.

The latch and rope-handrail fixings in the stair will be fitted into masonry joints, limiting their impact. However, the stair also has surviving historic plaster and avoiding the plaster has not been included in the specification. Consequently, a condition has been added. Both items may partly detract from the character of this part of the castle. The gate will be temporary in order to provide safe public access to the castle's ground floor until the interior can be fully consolidated and full public access restored. The handrail will also facilitate safe public access, allowing greater access to and enjoyment of the castle. These benefits outweigh the slight impact on the stair's character.

The excavation and backfilling of the earlier excavations will have a minimal direct impact on archaeological deposits. The results could significantly enhance the understanding of the monument. The use of community volunteers should increase public engagement with the project and strict supervision should prevent any damage being incurred. The earlier excavations make little contribution to the monument's cultural significance or to the character or visitor experience of the enclosure. The backfilling will, therefore, have a no impact on the monuments significance, especially as the top of the wall footings would remain visible. This should also enable and facilitate greater use of the monument, allowing it to be used for events, and encouraging much greater public appreciation and enjoyment of the area's historic environment.

The three interpretation boards within the castle enclosure would have no direct impacts upon underlying archaeological deposits. During pre-application discussions it was agreed that the one to be mounted outside the castle entrance would be fixed into joints. This is not specified in the application and therefore needs to be covered by a condition. The interpretation boards would detract somewhat from the character and feel of the space around the castle enclosure. However, they should greatly enhance the visitor experience and their understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of the castle.

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

The project team includes a natural environment specialist, who has conducted a number of surveys – on file from the time of the previous SMC application, and who regularly visits the works and advises on how potential impacts on EPS can be avoided.

d) Conclusion

The consolidation works will represent a significant benefit to the fabric and structural integrity of the monument. Provided the items which require greater clarification and need to be controlled through conditions, outlined above, are addressed the works can be considered to be the minimum necessary to preserve the monument's long term preservation – in line with SHEP paragraph 3.16.

The interpretation and public access works, whilst providing public benefits which will enhance the monument's appreciation, will also have minimal impact on archaeological deposits and the monument's cultural significance. They therefore do not conflict with this policy.

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 conditions detailed below.**

7. Conditions

1. No support bars shall be provided within the tower entrance unless otherwise agreed in writing beforehand by Historic Environment Scotland.

Reason: to ensure that the works are necessary and that any impacts upon the historic fabric are minimised.

2. Consolidation of the corner of the inner stair shall not commence until a specification has been agreed in writing beforehand by Historic Environment Scotland.

Reason: to ensure that the works are necessary and that any impacts upon the historic fabric are minimised.

3. No works to consolidate the enclosure entrance (including the provision of support bars, pinning and corbelling) shall commence until a specification has been agreed in writing beforehand by Historic Environment Scotland.

Reason: to ensure that the works are necessary and that any impacts upon the historic fabric are minimised.

4. The yett shall not be installed until the location has been agreed in writing beforehand by Historic Environment Scotland.

Reason: to ensure that impacts upon the historic fabric are minimised.

5. The fixings within the inner stair, for the gate-latch and handrail, shall be inserted into masonry joints and shall not be inserted into stonework or historic plaster.

Reason: to ensure that impacts upon the historic fabric are minimised.

6. The fixings for interpretation board on the outer enclosure wall face, adjacent to the enclosure entrance, shall be inserted into masonry joints only.

Reason: to ensure that impacts upon the historic fabric are minimised.

8. Approval

Officer	John Raven	Date	13/04/2016
Approved by	George Findlater	Date	13/04/2016

Annex A – list of supporting documents

1. Document list.
2. Drawing Register: Dunollie Castle.
3. Working Statement of Intent for the re-examination of a trench within the Courtyard of Dunollie Castle.
4. Proposed Information Panel Locations (422/21 – 5 April 2016)
5. W/SW Elevation Proposals (422/18C – 5 April 2016)
6. S/SE Elevation Proposals (422/16C – 5 April 2016)
7. Yett Assembly (422/40 – 5 April 2016)
8. Yett (422/39 – 5 April 2016)
9. Rope Handrail (422/38 – 5 April 2016)
10. Gate (422/41 – 6 April 2016) (submitted 7 April 2016)
11. Interpretation mounting sketch (submitted 7 April 2016)