# Scheduled Monument Consent:
Report on Handling

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND | ÀRAINNEACHD EACHDRAIDHEIL ALBA

## Case information

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| **Reference/Case ID** | 201601616 |

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| **Scheduled Monument** | St Moluag's Cathedral, Lismore | | |
| **Index no** | M286 | **Grid Ref** | NM860435 186000.0000 743500.0000 |

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| **Date of Application** | 27 June 2016 | **Application Received** | 27 June 2016 |
| **Summary of proposed works** | Erection of a fence, removal of surface debris, preliminary excavations to assess condition and extent of previous interventions, examination and moving of a pile of stones. | | |

## 1. Summary recommendation

This report recommends approval is granted without conditions.

## 2. Background

The monument comprises the remains of St Moluag's Cathedral, the seat of the Bishops of Argyll, which includes some upstanding structures and sub-surface archaeological deposits. The site may also have been the location for an Early Medieval monastery in the mid 6th century AD.

The medieval cathedral may date from the early 13th century AD. The footprint extended over 30m in length and was approximately 10m wide. The eastern end is still in use as the parish church. The western end and the foundation for a tower survive as foundations.

Excavations were undertaken in the western part of the nave in the 1950s. Trenches were excavated to the north of the parish church, in an area now occupied by a modern cemetery, in the 1990s.

The scheduled area includes the parish church, the old churchyard to its south, part of the modern cemetery to its north, and the foundations of the former western part of the cathedral which now lie within an agricultural field. The scheduling excludes the above-ground elements of the parish church and all boundary features, including stone walls, gates and fencing.

The monument is of national importance because of its potential to add to our understanding of the origins and development of Christianity. Archaeological remains relating to the medieval cathedral have been confirmed to survive. The monument

significantly contributes to our understanding of medieval religious worship and administration in Argyll.

The application has been supported with a Project Design. A draft was submitted to HES during pre-application discussions. HES provided comments and these have been addressed in the document that accompanied the application.

The aims of the proposed works are to:

- improve public access to, and the appearance of, the western end of the cathedral.
- assess the condition and preservation of remains at the western end of the cathedral.
- ensure the long-term preservation of the cathedral.

To do this it is proposed to:

1. enclose the western end of the cathedral while maintaining access for stock.
2. cut vegetation and remove modern surface debris.
3. create safe public access to the western end of the cathedral.
4. undertake preliminary excavations to assess the condition of foundations, the extent of previous excavations and the location, depth and sensitivity of archaeological deposits.
5. examine a pile of stones, with all worked or dressed examples placed to one site and the rest stacked neatly.

Item 2 does not require SMC and is not described further.

The Project Design contains a short description of the current condition of the western part of the former cathedral. It notes that the foundations of the nave walls are only visible at the tower and western terminus of the nave. There are several hollows in the ground surface, which are thought likely to relate to 1950s excavations.

## 3. Proposals

**Consented works:** Erection of a fence, removal of surface debris, preliminary excavations to assess condition and extent of previous interventions, examination and moving of a pile of stones.

The Project Design sets out the proposed works in detail and these are summarised below. The design also sets out the scope and methodology of an archaeological programme of work and is, in effect, a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI).

**Enclosure of nave and tower**
The western end of the former cathedral would be separated from the agricultural field it lies within by ryelock fencing. This would include a gate to allow stock to enter the

enclosed area. The enclosure would create a defined area for visitors while allowing livestock onto the monument to graze or to be excluded from it.

A section of this new fence would be located within the scheduled area. Holes for posts within the scheduled area would be hand dug to the required depth (likely to be no more than 0.5m) by a suitably qualified archaeologist. The archaeologist would ensure that any archaeological deposits or finds encountered were adequately recorded. If *in situ* burials were encountered they would be covered in terram and the hole backfilled. An alternative hole for the post would then be excavated.

**Creation of safe access**
A new pedestrian access for visitors would be created from the graveyard to the south of the parish church into the newly enclosed area.

The exact location of this access has yet to be decided, although a gap in the graveyard wall has been identified as a possible location. Works would proceed once permission has been granted by Argyll and Bute Council and HES would be consulted with.

The hinges and catch of the gate would be embedded into the graveyard wall. The wall is specifically excluded from the scheduling and so no consent would be needed for alterations to it. However, the ground around the new access may need to be modified slightly to produce a level and safe surface.

Any required excavations would be undertaken using standard archaeological methods. If *in situ* burials were encountered work would be halted and the remains protected by terram before being covered with a sufficient depth of soil to ensure any footfall did not impact upon them.

If archaeological deposits prevented the creation of level access through the gate then alternative surface coverings and/or the creation of a stepped access would be discussed with HES and Argyll and Bute Council.

**Preliminary excavations**
It is proposed to undertake the controlled excavation of three trenches as set out below. The overall aims of the preliminary excavations are to:

- expose walls and allow for the accurate recording of their size, mode of construction, condition and sampling of any mortar material (see below).
- expose deposits and allow for an assessment of the scale of the 1950s excavations, the nature of backfill material and the nature and location of any primary archaeological deposits.

Deposits would only be excavated where they are clearly backfill material derived from the 1950s excavations or other relatively recent or secondary activity. Excavation would proceed until primary archaeological levels (floors, ground surface, tops of graves etc.) were reached. No such primary deposits would be excavated.

Trench 1: It is proposed to open a trench over the northwest corner of the nave and the northern wall of the tower. This would incorporate the location of a 1950s excavation trench and measure 6m east-west by 5m north-south. The trench would be designed to:

- reveal the west and north wall of the nave.
- reveal the north wall of the tower.
- confirm the relationship between the nave and the tower.
- expose the internal fill(s) of the nave and external deposits.

Trench 2: It is proposed to open a trench over a portion of the west wall of the nave and an internal wall. The trench would measure 4m east-west and 2m north-south. The trench would be designed to:

- reveal the west wall of the nave.
- reveal an internal wall.
- confirm the relationship between the nave wall and the internal wall.
- expose internal fill(s) of the nave.

Trench 3: It is proposed to open a trench up to 3m x 3m over an indentation in the ground level of the nave. The trench would be designed to:

- determine whether the indentation reflects a 1950s excavation.
- determine the depth of stratigraphy within the interior of the nave.
- determine presence or absence of *in situ* primary deposits within the nave.

**Analysis of masonry and mortars**

The Scottish Medieval Castles and Chapels C-14 Project (SMCCCP), headed by Dr Mark Thacker, aims to investigate how construction techniques and material sources for masonry buildings developed in Scotland. It explores the archaeological potential of those materials through lab-based analysis and environmental survey.

As part of the proposed works Dr Thacker would investigate any surviving masonry, mortars and characterize them *in situ*. He would examine any mortar stratigraphy and take samples for lab-based analysis. Mortar contexts would be recorded. Any samples would weigh approximately 100g.

Any dressed stone, *in situ* or in a secondary context, would be characterised, recorded and sampled for possible petrographic analysis. Representative loose or core samples would be prioritised over *in situ* face stones.

**Reinstatement**

On completion each trench would be lined with terram and the excavated material replaced. The contours prior to the excavation would be reproduced as far as possible and no spoil would be left on the site. If the 1950s excavation trenches were demonstrated not to have been backfilled, the level of backfill would be greater than that prior to the current excavations in order to afford protection to any underlying undisturbed deposits.

**Clearance and re-stacking of rubble**
A large pile of re-deposited stone lies within the scheduled area. Some of this may have been surplus from construction of the graveyard wall but at least one piece appears to have been dressed and carved. It, and others in the pile, may have derived from the cathedral.

The pile of stone would be removed by hand, with each individual stone examined and all dressed and/or worked stones put aside for examination and recording. The unworked stone would be neatly stacked against the manse wall.

**Public engagement, outreach and education**
One of the key aims of the project is to improve visitor access and make the monument easier to appreciate visually.

The works are the second phase of a community-based project. The lifting and display of decorated grave slabs has already been successfully completed.

Volunteers would assist with the excavation. There would be no more than 3 volunteers per archaeologist working within any of the trenches. Other volunteers would assist with the clearance and sorting of the pile of stones. Informal training in archaeological skills would be given by a team of three experienced archaeologists.

Dr Thacker would carry out a lime burning demonstration away from the scheduled monument. This would involve volunteers in the construction and firing of a kiln.

An open day would be held with visitors offered a site tour. A public meeting would be held in the autumn on Lismore to share the results of the work and discuss potential future plans and desired outcomes.

**Reporting and archive**
Results would be presented in the form of a written report submitted to HES before the end of September 2016.

The report would be prepared in accordance with best practice and would include recommendations for further works (archaeological and conservation).

Summary reports would be submitted to Discovery and Excavation in Scotland and the OASIS database. One paper copy and a digital copy of the report would be supplied to HES and the WoSAS SMR.

The archive would be deposited in the National Monuments Record of Scotland and artefacts would be processed, stored and disposed of in accordance with best practice.

**Project Team and standards**
The project would be managed by Dr Clare Ellis of Argyll Archaeology who is a member of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists. She would be assisted by two

experienced volunteer archaeologists. The other volunteers would be recruited and organised by Mr Robert Hay of Lismore Heritage Society. The final report would be complied by Dr Clare Ellis.

The work would be undertaken in accordance with relevant Codes of Conduct and standards of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists.

## 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.

- Historic Environment Scotland Policy Statement, June 2016 (the Policy Statement)

3.14. A monument is included 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 this policy statement, 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.

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.

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**

We consider that the proposals should improve public access to and management of a scheduled monument by the erection of a fence to control stock and creation of new access.

Exploratory trenches would provide information on the condition of the cathedral's foundations and the extent of earlier interventions. This information could be used to inform plans for future consolidation and presentation to the public.

The works would also improve the visual appearance of the monument by the control of vegetation and clearance of a pile of stones. The work would involve volunteers and an open day.

We consider that the work may have some wider benefits related to an enhanced understanding of the spread of early Christianity, which is a key research area set out in the medieval panel report of the Scottish Archaeological Research Framework (Section 4.6).

We conclude that the proposed works would improve public access, appreciation and understanding of the historic environment and of this scheduled monument in particular. These aims are consistent with the Policy Statement's Key Principles.

We consider that the erection of the fence has been designed to avoid adverse impacts on the cultural significance of the monument. In particular, any ground disturbance caused by the fence's erection would be archaeologically controlled.

The excavation of three trenches aimed at assessing the condition of wall foundations related to the monument and the nature of deposits around them would cease where sensitive, primary deposits were encountered. Overlying, relatively modern deposits would be disturbed but we do not consider these to contribute to the monument's cultural significance.

The only part of the work that would disturb sensitive remains would be the retrieval of samples from walls. However, we assess those samples as minimal and their retrieval would not materially change the cultural significance of the affected structures. On completion sensitive archaeological deposits would be covered and the trenches backfilled.

We conclude that because they are designed to avoid impacts on sensitive archaeological remains the works are consistent with conserving the monument's cultural significance. Hence, they are in accord with the Policy Statement paragraph 3.16.

The Project Design has clearly set out the aims of, and justification for, the works. Hence we consider the proposal to be consistent with the Policy Statement paragraph 3.17.

It is concluded that any effects on the monument's cultural significance should be minimal and so the proposed works are in accord with the Policy Statement paragraph 3.18.

The monument's archaeological value should be better understood and otherwise largely unaffected by the proposed work. The proposed works cannot, therefore, be considered as extensive (Policy Statement 3.19).

We have assessed the Project Design and WSI and conclude that the work would be undertaken to an appropriate standard by an experienced Project Team with sufficient resources. Therefore the proposed work is consistent with the Policy Statement 3.20.

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

The application site does not lie in a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) or Special Protection Area. National Biodiversity Network GIS data sets indicate no evidence for Protected Species in the relevant 100m grid squares.

**d) Conclusion**

Because they would alter a scheduled monument we consider the proposals to be works as defined in Section 2 of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979.

The works would involve the controlled removal and recording of some deposits of little archaeological significance, which do not materially contribute to the monument's intrinsic value. They are primarily aimed at improving the monument's appearance, management and public access to it. They should enhance our understanding of the monument and, perhaps, the wider medieval period.

The work should have considerable benefits. It has been designed to leave the site's sensitive archaeological deposits intact and would not materially detract from the monument's national significance.

It is concluded that the works would not compromise the long term preservation of the monument (Policy Statement 3.14). The proposal is the minimum necessary to achieve the project's aims and consistent with conserving the cultural significance of the monument (Policy Statement 3.16).

The work has been fully justified in a Project Design (Policy Statement 3.17).

Because the monument's cultural significance would not be materially diminished the proposal is consistent with the Policy Statement paragraph 3.18 and is not assessed to be extensive intervention (Policy Statement 3.19).

The work has been properly planned and would be executed appropriately in accordance with a Project Design and WSI (Policy Statement 3.20). Consequently, no conditions are considered necessary.

## 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 therefore recommend that **consent is granted without conditions.**

## 7. Conditions

N/A

## 8. Approval

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| **Officer** | **Simon Stronach** | **Date** | **07/07/2016** |
| **Approved by** | **George Findlater** | **Date** | **12/07/2016** |

**Annex A – list of supporting documents**

Lismore Nave: Project Design
Email from Argyll Archaeology (4 July 2016)