Case information

Case ID	300017881
File Reference	AMJ/9336/1/1
Name of Site	Knockbrex Fort, 55m ENE of Doonwood

Local Authority	Dumfries & Galloway
National Grid Reference	NX 5876 4935
Designation No. (if any)	SM13651
Case Type	Proposal for scheduling

Received/Start Date	18/05/2015
Decision Date	09/08/2016

1. Decision

The assessment against criteria demonstrates that the monument is of national importance. The decision is to add the monument to the schedule of nationally important monuments as **Knockbrex Fort, 55m ENE of Doonwood**.

2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

2.1 Designation Background

The site was surveyed in 1911 by the Royal Commission of Ancient and Historic Monuments (RCAHMS) where its location was noted as 'immediately east of the gardener's house at Knockbrex'. The monument was noted as an oval fort with double ditch and ramparts, situated on the edge of a narrow ridge. The scheduling of Knockbrex Fort in 1938 adopted the earlier RCAHMS description but incorrectly noted the position of the monument as the 'Doon' (as noted on OS maps), a possibly natural outcrop situated to the west of the gardener's house at Knockbrex. On a RCAHMS visit in 1951 and a subsequent OS visit in 1971, it was noted that the monument (as described) no longer existed. The Knockbrex Fort (Doon) was descheduled in February 2016 following a site visit which confirmed that the scheduled site (Doon) did not resemble the described fort. A scheduling proposal for the location of a site matching the 1911 description of the fort was received in March 2016. The site was visited on 27th April 2016 and it was confirmed that a fort similar in dimensions and form to that described in 1911 was present within Doonwood.

2.2 Development Proposals

N/A.

3. Assessment

3.1 Assessment information

The site was visited on 27/04/2016.

3.2 Assessment against designation criteria

An assessment against the Scheduling criteria has been carried out (see Annex A).

The monument was found to meet the criteria for scheduling.

The designation criteria are published in the Historic Environment Scotland policy statement June 2016, Annex 1, pp. 48-50.
https://www.historicenvironment.scot/advice-and-support/planning-and-guidance/legislation-and-guidance/historic-environment-scotland-policy-statement/

3.3 Other considerations

N/A.

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ANNEX A – Assessment Against the Scheduling Criteria
Knockbrex Fort, 55m ENE of Doonwood.

1 Description

The monument is the remains of a fort, probably dating to the Iron Age (between about 800 BC and AD 500). The fort's ramparts are visible as turf-covered banks and the ditches as depressions. The monument lies 20m above sea level, on a ridge orientated west-southwest north-northeast. There are views northwest and southwest from the site towards the coast.

The fort consists of an oval enclosure, measuring 42m in length and 16m in width, on a ridge summit defined in places by a low bank. Both the north and south ends of the ridge are cut by two deep ditches with a bank between each ditch. The northern defences are particularly well preserved with the bank up to 2m in height. Taking in the outer ramparts the monument measures up to 70m in length. A slumped area at the north-east corner of the fort may have been an entrance.

The scheduled area is irregular on plan and includes the remains described above and an area around them within which evidence relating to the monument's construction, use and abandonment is expected to survive, as shown in red on the accompanying map. The scheduling extends to, but excludes, the stone dyke to the west of the fort.

2 Assessment Against the Scheduling Criteria (Historic Environment Scotland policy statement June 2016, Annex 1, pp. 48-50.)

2.1 Intrinsic Characteristics

The fort's layout is clearly visible defined by upstanding earthworks consisting of ramparts and ditches cutting across and enclosing a flat-topped, probably levelled, ridge. The ramparts are visible as turf-covered banks, and the ditches as grassy depressions. The monument is within mixed woodland and overall the site survives in a very good condition.

There is good potential for further evidence of the defences and entrances to survive as archaeological deposits as well as archaeological evidence for buildings or associated structures within the fort. There is also good potential for the presence, particularly within the fill of the ditches, of artefacts and ecofacts, such as pottery, stone tools and charred plant remains or pollen. Such artefactual and palaeoenvironmental evidence can enhance our understanding of the daily lives of the inhabitants of the fort, the economic basis of the settlement and the contemporary environment.

The monument dates probably to the Iron Age (between about 800 BC and AD 500), though similar sites were established as early as the late Bronze Age, and some remained in use into the early medieval period. The double ditches across the ridge-ends, and the possible lower platform to the southwest, may represent a development sequence that saw the fort expanded over time. Scientific research could allow us to develop a better understanding of the chronology of the site, including its date of origin, development sequence and abandonment. The site may have functioned as a defended settlement, housing several families or a small community and their livestock. However, there is as yet no evidence for how the fort was occupied: whether it was an occasional refuge or saw seasonal occupation, or had a specialist function within a pastoral economy.

2.2 Contextual Characteristics

There are over 13 forts recorded within a 10km radius of the monument, most on hilltops or higher ground. This monument is important as an upstanding and relatively well-preserved example, with multiple banks and ditches on some sides. The topographic location of the fort is unusual for although its location on a ridge is naturally defensive, the site is overlooked by higher ground nearby and it would not have been particularly prominent. The fort has views west over the coastal margins.

There are other broadly contemporary monuments in the landscape surrounding the monument, including Barn Heugh fort which is of a similar scale and with a similar topographic location, (scheduled monument reference SM1052 and Canmore ID 63624) situated around 2.5km southeast. There is the potential to study these sites together to better understand their functions and the significance of their placing in the landscape. We can expect that there were links between defended settlements, and this fort has the potential to enhance and broaden our understanding of the development of settlement and the nature of settlement patterns in Dumfries and Galloway.

2.3 Associative Characteristics

N/A.

3 Purpose and implications of scheduling

The field investigation concluded the site is in a stable condition and well preserved. There are no immediate threats to the preservation of the monument. Designation as a scheduled monument remains the most appropriate mechanism to secure the preservation of the monument, and ensure the recognition of its national importance.

4 Assessment of national importance

The monument is of national importance because of its potential to make a significant addition to our knowledge and understanding of the design and construction of Iron Age forts, and prehistoric forts in general, in the south and southwest of Scotland. The fort has good field characteristics, allowing us to interpret its form and position in the landscape and has potential for the presence of buried archaeological remains, including artefacts and palaeoenvironmental evidence. There are numerous other broadly contemporary monuments in the vicinity, including other forts as well as enclosed and unenclosed Iron Age settlements which together can contribute to our understanding of the form of the prehistoric landscape. This is important for enhancing our understanding of prehistoric society, its organisation, economy, religion and demography. The loss of the monument would significantly diminish our ability to appreciate and understand the use of forts and their role and function within the prehistoric communities which constructed them.

5 References

Historic Environment Scotland http://www.canmore.org.uk reference number CANMORE ID 63621 (accessed on 01/06/2016).

Dumfries & Galloway Council Historic Environment Record reference: ID MDG3227 (accessed on 01/06/2016).

ScARF (2012) Hunter, F. and Carruther, M. (eds) Iron Age Panel Report, The Scottish Archaeological Research Framework: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

RCAHMS (1913) Fifth Report, Inventory of Monuments in Kircudbright. Edinburgh.

RCAHMS (1997) Eastern Dumfriesshire: an archaeological landscape. Edinburgh. Pages 118-167