Scheduled Monument Consent:
Report on Handling

Case information

Reference/Case ID	201602377

Scheduled Monument	Moredun Top, fort		
Index no	M9440	**Grid Ref**	NO136199 313600.0000 719900.0000

Date of Application	28 July 2016	**Application Received**	05 August 2016
Summary of proposed works	Excavation of Moredun Top hillfort		

1. Summary recommendation

This report recommends that approval for the excavation of the hillfort at Moredun Top be granted with conditions.

2. Background

The historic environment asset and its cultural significance

The monument comprises the remains of a hillfort with evidence for use dating from both the late Iron Age and the Early Historic period.

The monument lies between 190-225m O.D. and crowns the summit of Moredun Top, the highest part of Moncreiffe Hill. From this point, it commands extensive views of the surrounding landscape and exploits the naturally defensive cliffs on the S face of the hill.

The fort appears to show two main phases of construction and use. The first phase is a large roughly oval enclosure, measuring approximately 175m E-W by 100m N-S, defined by a stone and earth rampart. A second, inner, rampart may also date from this phase. The summit of the hill is enclosed by a double set of stone ramparts or walls. These define another roughly oval area approximately 50m NW-SE by 35m transversely. Within this enclosed area is a large mound, the mound may contain the remains of a stone broch. A further rampart following the natural contours of the hill on the N side encloses a large semi-circular "court" or annex, similar to other Early Historic sites throughout Scotland. Traces of possible footings for circular buildings

have been recorded on the hill summit, but it is not clear which phases of defensive activity these relate to.

In addition to the physical remains, the site may also have historic associations. In AD728 a significant battle in the struggle for control of the Pictish Kingdom was fought at Monad Croib, also known as Monad Craebi. The modern "Moncreiffe" may derive from these earlier place names.

The Project

The TLP ‘Hillforts of the Tay Project’ is based on a set of research objectives designed in response to both the national Scottish Archaeological Research Framework (SCARF) , the Historic Environment Scotland Policy Statement (HES 2016) and in the context of a number of ongoing regional research initiatives.

SCARF section 6.4 of the Iron Age chapter sets out the current understanding of enclosed places and its specific research recommendations that there is a lack of information about a number of aspects relating to hillforts within the Iron Age:

The discipline would benefit from an overall review of the social context of enclosed places, based upon a detailed review of the evidence.

1. The lack of dating evidence for enclosed sites in many areas is a severe constraint in understanding them.
2. The lack of evidence for activities within such sites, due to limited work in enclosure interiors, is another severe constraint, as are the difficulties in connecting interior activity to enclosure sequences.

These aspects will be addressed by this excavation as set out in the project design.

The Tay Landscape Partnership (TLP) scheme ‘Hillforts of the Tay Project’ involves reconnaissance survey and fieldwork at Moredun Top, and the first session of excavation was undertaken in 2015. The work of the TLP Hillforts of the Tay project will feed into a wider programme of research by Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust into settlement types and patterns covering throughout the wider area from c.1,000 BC to c. AD 1,000. This work has included excavation of a range of broadly contemporary and related sites in highland Perthshire (including Blackspout, Strachan 2013). This is enabling the project to develop a regional context for hill forts and enclosed sites. The results also feed into wider national agendas being developed through contemporary excavation and research programmes, such as SERF. In turn this will directly feed into an understanding of the diversity and development of the Iron Age throughout Scotland.

The overarching objective of this project is to ‘establish a chronology for the development of this complex of sites’ and to clarify the chronology and use of hillforts in lowland Perthshire and Kinross. Specific targets through which to achieve this objective are the mound, ramparts of the enclosures, and interior of the enclosures.

The applicant

The project is directed by Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust and delivered through TLP staff working with archaeological contractors AOC Archaeology Ltd. The project involves large-scale community engagement and student involvement. SMC was previously granted for the first phase of this project in 2015. Although a continuation of the same project, a new and separate SMC application has allowed the applicant to steer to respond to the results of the first phase.

Pre-application discussions

The applicant submitted a draft project design on 24 June 2016, to which HES responded with comments on 13 July 2016. The applicant wishes to commence excavation on 01 September 2016 for a period of four weeks. The present application has been adapted as a result of this pre-application consultation and it accords with the outcome of these discussions.

3. Proposals

Consented works - Excavation of Moredun Top hillfort.

The proposals comprise:

The excavation of eight trenches which have a combined area of 685sqm.

- Excavation of a 10m x 20m trench (Trench A) to investigate the relationship of the two roundhouses identified in the field survey, including extending a trench previously excavated in 2015.
- Excavation of a 5m x 5m trench (Trench B) to assess a roundhouse identified by field survey.
- Excavation of a 15m x 15m trench (Trench C) to investigate Mound A and determine if it is the remains of a broch.
- Excavation of a 4m x 10m trench (Trench D) to investigate the nature of the circular pond.
- Excavation of a 4m x 30m trench (Trench E) to investigate the relationship between mound A and the walls of enclosures B and C, and annexe. A small part of this trench is outwith the scheduled area.
- Excavation of three 5m x 5m trenches (Trench F-H) to investigate the internal area of annexe D.

Given the overarching objective of this project is to ‘establish a chronology for the development of this complex of sites’ the following specific targets we identified.

1. The Mound: The mound is potentially a complex stone round house or broch and the confirmation of this through excavation would be a significant discovery. If the mound is identified as a broch this would enhance our

understanding of the development of this high status Iron Age site and other comparable sites. There are already a few known broch sites in the area: such as Hurly Hawkin and Laws Broch (near Dundee) and the recent discovery of the broch at Castle Craig. All of these brochs are located within hillforts and the relationship between these structures and the hillfort sequences is not fully understood. The Mound at Moredun Top has a significant potential to contribute to our understanding of these site types. The excavation of trench C has been located to answer the question on whether the mound is a broch. If a broch is present the excavation in this trench will expose the broch wall and overall layout of the feature. The excavation of trench E will address how this structure relates to the hillfort defences (enclosing banks and ditches).

2. The Ramparts: The hillfort defences are key to understanding the development sequence of the site, other hill top sites have shown to have elaborate development sequences with multiple enclosed and unenclosed phases (such as Broxmouth Hillfort). Trench E has been positioned in a location that will reveal the relationship between the ramparts, producing a stratigraphic relationship and hopefully providing material to date these phases. The trench will section the upstanding banks and ditch fill to expose and record the profile of these features.

3. Interiors: While the excavation of the ramparts can provide an overall chronology for the site, it will not provide significant information about the nature of the occupation of the site. In order to understand this occupation and answer questions relating to the density of occupation and how this changed over time, five trenches will be excavated in the interior of the enclosure banks. Trench A has been positioned to explore the relationship between two round houses, to attempt to determine if they were occupied at the same time and to clarify how they relate to the different enclosure phases. The trench is located in the small internal enclosure and the excavation of these houses may clarify the occupation sequence for this feature. Trench B is located out with this small enclosure but within the main larger enclosure of the hillfort. The trench is also located on a round house and will inform our understanding of the occupation of this main enclosure and how it may differ from the inner enclosure. Trenches F, G and H are located within the northern Annex of the site and will address how this annex related to the rest of the site, both its phasing and if the occupation or function of this area differed from the larger enclosure.

Methodology

All trenches will be excavated by hand under the supervision of the site directors, with all turf and topsoil being removed and set aside for reinstatement. Once the topsoil has been stripped, the exposed profiles will be recorded in plan. Any features encountered will be sectioned and 50% excavated.

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 in 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, which 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. (Annex 1 sets out guidance as to how cultural significance and national importance should be determined).

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.

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:

a. the use of appropriate assessment methodologies to determine the full impact of any proposed management, use, or development;
c. that where change is necessary, strategies should be adopted to mitigate its impact and limit intervention;
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 the hillfort of Moredun Top in Perthshire, through the opening of eight trenches.

Overview of works

This SMC application is for the final two seasons of excavation proposed at this monument as part of the Tay Landscape Partnership (TLP) scheme ‘Hillforts of the Tay Project’. There has been a prior season of excavation in 2015 and these next two seasons are a continuation of these works. The trenches have been designed to specifically target areas where answers to previously established research questions are still required.

Methodology

The methodology highlighted in the project design conforms to industry standards.

For research excavations such as this the following considerations should therefore be made: (1) Justification of principle of the works; (2) Quality and importance of the research agenda; (3) Demonstration of the use of appropriately skilled personnel; (4) Ability to fully implement the research design during the duration of the works; (5)

Demonstration of the financial and general resources to carry out all the works; (6) Post-excavation and publication strategy; (7) Reinstatement or post-excavation site management strategy.

(1) Justification of principle of the works;

The Tay Landscape Partnership (TLP) scheme 'Hillforts of the Tay Project' intends to gain a better understanding of the development of hillforts around the Tay. This contributes to our knowledge of the development of these sites in the Iron Age and their later role within the emerging Scottish kingdoms of the early medieval period. This research need has been highlighted at the level of national research agendas (e.g. SCARF).

Moredun Top occupies a strategic location at the confluence of the rivers Tay and Earn and has intervisibility with a number of other hillforts that cluster around the Tay estuary. It is by far the largest monument of its type in the area, and thus has a presumed hierarchical importance. As such, the research agenda outlined in the project design focuses on the site of Moredun Top. The research questions are specific to the site and therefore could not be address by excavating another hillfort. The same information that is being sought through the excavation of this monument cannot readily be found through excavation of another monument that is undesignated.

The outputs from this work will be published in a peer reviewed monograph at national level. The works will make a significant contribution to our scientific understanding of the monument and its period.

(2) Quality and importance of the research agenda;

The research agenda has been developed to address a series of key future research areas and issues as identified in the Scottish Archaeological Research Framework (SCARF), including investigating the formation of prehistoric hillforts in Perthshire and their role in the development of early medieval politics. The wider project is also designed to facilitate and empower community engagement with archaeology and culture. Local volunteers have been involved in the excavation to date. These wider community aims are in line with 'Scotland's Historic Environment Strategy: Our Place in Time'. The research agenda to be sufficiently robust and capable of delivering public benefits of a national level through enhanced knowledge of a high status monument and through established opportunities for community engagement.

(3) Demonstration of the use of appropriately skilled personnel;

The applicant has confirmed that the planned teams will consist of PKHT staff, David Strachan (Project Director) and Sophie Nicol (Site Director); Martin Cook (Site Director), and at least 5 contracted professional staff employed by commercial contractor AOC Archaeology (Dr Dawn McLaren, Jess Lumb, Cathy McIvor, Katie Roper, Jamie Humble) with 30-38 volunteers (a ratio of 1 supervisor to 6 volunteers).

The ratio of directors/supervisors vs volunteers should therefore be averaging below 1:6. This ratio is considered high on a site of national importance, the project team has the necessary level of experience to work on this monument but they are unlikely to be able to provide the sufficient level of control that will be necessary when excavating sensitive deposits. Therefore, when excavating complex or sensitive archaeological deposits, to allow the appropriate level of control, the practical ratio should never be greater than 1:3.

(4) Ability to fully implement the research design during the duration of the works;

The approach and methods for the excavation have been outlined fully in the project design, and rely on a tried and tested approach that has previously proven successful for this project.

The trench sizing, position, and specific justification in relation to the research aims has been set out in the project design and has been revised following pre-application discussions with HES. The project design lacks detail in relation to how the project team will manage the discovery of any substantial archaeological deposits, this is a concern in relation to trench A and trench C, where significantly complex archaeological and structural deposits are expected. To ensure that the excavation of these features conforms with the overall project aims and that the projects has the suitable resources and capacity to deal with such discoveries it is necessary to inform Historic Environment Scotland of any such discovers. Such decisions would require an onsite assessment and can be dealt with as an iterative process.

The project design contains a statement on sampling and post-excavation strategy which sets out an appropriate strategy for handling environmental sampling, artefacts, and faunal material both during and after the excavation and these meet industry standards. The project design also sets out that relevant specialists have been keyed into the project where their expertise is necessary and as such is sufficient to meet industry standards.

Taking into account the level of expertise displayed by the directors and professional archaeologists, the project design is deliverable within the timescale and resource available.

(5) Demonstration of the financial and general resources to carry out all the works;

The excavation is principally funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund as part of the wider Tay Landscape Partnership. The project design sets out that the project has a contingency budget to deal with complex archaeological deposits. As such, the project is adequately resourced.

(6) Post-excavation and publication strategy;

The application sets out a long and short term post-excavation programme with all finds conserved, and select object drawn for publication. The 2016-17 budget for the

excavation includes funds for object analysis, botanics and conservation. As mentioned above, a statement on sampling and post-excavation strategy is included in the submitted project design which sets out an appropriate strategy for handling environmental sampling, artefacts, and faunal material both during and after the excavation.

A DSR will be produced within 3 months of the completion of the excavation on site, and this will be sent to HES and the local authority archaeologist. It will be necessary to condition a Post Excavation Research Design in addition to the DSR, to fully ensure that an adequate and accurate record of works to the monument is maintained in a timely manner and that the results are widely disseminated. The final outcome will be an academic peer reviewed project monograph on the archaeology of the Moredun Top. Provided that the supsensive conditions are adhered to, the post-excavation and publication strategy is sufficient to meet industry standards.

(7) Reinstatement or post-excavation site management strategy;

Upon completion of the excavation, all excavated features will be backfilled by hand and the turf returned. The post excavation monitoring will consist of monthly visits to address and problems of erosion of the backfilled trenches. The reinstatement strategy conforms to expected practice in relation to scheduled monuments and industry standards.

Summary

Taking into consideration the above, the outcomes of the excavation as set out in the project design in relation to increased knowledge of an important archaeological site, increased public understanding and engagement, and the developing of skills in the community represent a range of public benefits that are considered to be of national importance. The excavation of Mound A (trench C) will address whether the structure is a broch and how this structure relates to the overall site. Trench E will address the core question around development sequence for the ramparts and the other trenches will explore the nature of the overall site's occupation. The involvement of volunteers in the excavation and the groups visiting the site when the excavations are ongoing will increase public understanding and appreciation of the monument. The future publication of the excavation results will address key nationally important research questions. The adverse impact of the excavation as set out above has been judged in balance against these public benefits, and the proposals meet the public benefit test as set out in paragraph 3.19 of the policy statement.

The research design and methods have been fully and explicitly justified, have been carefully considered and are based on good authority, and are sensitively designed and planned and are thus capable of being executed. As such, provided that the supsensive conditions are adhered to the proposal meets paragraph 3.20 of the policy statement.

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

No impact on Protected Species and Places.

d) Conclusion

As a research excavation, the application should be viewed as works as set out in both Part 1 Section 2 of the AMAA Act 1979 and paragraph 3.4 of the policy statement.

The application, comprising the excavation of Moredun Top hillfort as part of the TLP 'Hillforts of the Tay Project', will result in the intended destruction of a small part of the monument. It cannot be seen as the minimum works necessary to conserve what is culturally significant of the monument. Consequently, the application does not meet paragraph 3.16 of the policy statement and therefore the application must be assessed against paragraph 3.19 of the policy statement.

However, the application is considered compliant with paragraphs 3.19 and 3.20 of the policy statement as it demonstrates that there is a public benefit of national importance that outweighs the impact on the cultural significance of the monument, and that the works are carefully considered, based on good authority, sensitively designed and properly planned.

From the information provided with this application, and based on pre-application discussions with the applicant, further conditions as outlined in paragraph 3.22 to ensure the works are undertaken in an appropriate manner are required. Therefore, a number of conditions have been recommended, specifically to allow: 1) when significant and/or complex archaeological deposits are being excavated that the ratio between skill supervisors and volunteers never exceeds 1:3; 2) That after the topsoil and overburden is removed from trench A and C, approval is sought before further excavation; 3) If significant archaeological or palaeoenvironmental deposits are located, the analysis of which is likely to over-extend the resources of the project, they must not be disturbed without further consultation and the prior written agreement of Historic Environment Scotland; 4) that the Data Structure Report will be submitted to Historic Environment Scotland; and 5) that the Post Excavation Research Design will be submitted to Historic Environment Scotland for approval.

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) When excavating complex or significant archaeological structures or deposits the ratio of skilled supervisors to volunteers should never be greater than 1:3.

   Reason: to ensure that any impacts on archaeological structures and deposits are appropriately controlled and monitored and that discoveries made during excavation are recorded adequately.

2) After the removal of topsoil and overburden from trench A and C, no significant archaeological deposits shall be excavated until Historic Environment Scotland has approved an excavation strategy in writing.

   Reason: to ensure that any impacts on archaeological structures and deposits are minimised and that any significant discoveries that are made during excavation are recorded adequately and can be dealt with appropriately in the defined timescale.

3) If significant archaeological or palaeoenvironmental deposits are located, the analysis of which is likely to over-extend the resources of the project, they must not be disturbed without further consultation and the prior written agreement of Historic Environment Scotland.

   Reason: to ensure that any impacts on archaeological structures and deposits are minimised and that any significant discoveries that are made during excavation are recorded adequately and can be dealt with appropriately in the defined timescale.

4) Within three months of each season's work being completed on site a copy of the Data Structure Report shall be submitted for approval by Historic Environment Scotland.

   Reason: to ensure that an adequate and accurate record of works to the monument is maintained.

5) Within six months of the works finishing on site for the last season a copy of the Post Excavation Research Design shall be submitted for approval by Historic Environment Scotland.

   Reason: to ensure that an adequate and accurate record of works to the monument is maintained and that the results are widely disseminated.

8. Approval

Officer	**James Bruhn**	**Date**	**11/08/2016**
Approved by	**Andrew Martindale**	**Date**	**24/08/2016**

Annex A – list of supporting documents

- Moredun Top Hillfort, Moncreiffe Hill, Perth, Project Design 2016-17
- Moredun Top - Figure 12 Trench locations
- Moredun Top - Figure 13 – Revised
- Trench_plan_moredun_top (in relation to the scheduled area)