Scheduled Monument Consent:
Report on Handling

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND | ÀRAINNEACHD EACHDRAIDHEIL ALBA

Case information

Reference/Case ID	201601909

Scheduled Monument	Sweetheart Abbey, abbey, precinct and walls		
Index no	M90293	**Grid Ref**	NX965662 296500.0000 566200.0000

Date of Application	11 July 2016	**Application Received**	11 July 2016
Summary of proposed works	Repairs to rough racking, stonework descaling and localised repointing of South Aisle at Arcade / SW Corner Wall.		

1. Summary recommendation

This report recommends that consent be granted.

2. Background

Site description
The monument comprises the precinct and remains of the Cistercian Abbey of Sweetheart, or New Abbey, founded as a daughter house of Dundrennan Abbey by Devorgilla Balliol in 1273. The church consists of a six-bayed nave with side aisles. The south aisle was demolished at some point after the Scottish Reformation, evidenced now only be its footings and broken masonry on the external walls of the nave. The works are confined to where the south aisle joins with the southwest corner of the nave.

Original wall core is also evident amongst this broken masonry, largely concealed by rough racking. These areas represent the scars left after the removal of the aisle vaulting in the post-Reformation period. The broken masonry was conserved and rough-racked as part of the 1930s conservation work on the site, and this rough-racking has seen several episodes of repair using cementitious mortar. While original core material exists within the overall matrix at this point, the present appearance owes vastly more to a long history of monument consolidation than its historic appearance after demolition. The cultural significance of this wall core, broken masonry and rough-racking lies in the fact that it helps reveal the approximate form and massing of the south aisle of the abbey church, and the history of the site's demolition. The site is in the care of HES.

Pre-application discussions
Conservation and Maintenance Directorate approached Heritage Management Directorate earlier this summer regarding the need to repair the rough-racking and descale delaminating masonry, which has begun to break up and pose a risk of loss.

A resulting health-and-safety risk has also been identified. An outline repair method was proposed, which was modified after a formal pre-application enquiry. The modification means that the impact should be entirely limited to the original core material and rough-racking.

Planning history
Consolidation works at Sweetheart Abbey have been ongoing since 2009, starting at the crossing tower (focussing on the south transept interior) and then extensive downtaking and rebuilding of the (largely 1930s) south wallhead of the bell tower in 2010-12. Further consented repairs are ongoing to the external buttresses of the north transept, which were in a condition similar to that of the southwest corner of the nave.

3. Proposals

A. The need for the proposed works
The original wall core material was conserved by rough-racking over it using small red sandstone blocks retained in a bed of cementitious mortar. Substantial parts of this wall core material have weathered back, allowing small fragments of mortar to fail and drop to the ground. Individual stone blocks in the rough-racking are now precariously retained within the overall matrix, and there is a risk of these detaching and falling to the ground. This area of the site is very accessible to the public, and lies within 5m of the access path into the site. As there is a clear and evolving risk to health-and-safety, the applicant has considered options for dealing with the issue.

B. The potential options examined
At pre-application stage, it was agreed between the applicant and HMD that a full options appraisal would not be necessary given the small area affected, but that reasons should be given for rejecting any other repair method. Alternatives included:

- Building up over the rough-racked area in new stone: this was rejected because it would be a departure from historic conservation of the site, and would make it harder to read the relationship between the nave and the aisle
- Repairing the rough-racking *in situ*: this was rejected because it would not deal with the health-and-safety issue, leaving the risk that stones would not be adequately retained
- A ‘do-nothing’ option was rejected as it would mean that this area of the site would have to be fenced off, and would still leave a residual risk of stones falling towards the access path or the nave interior

C. The proposals
It is proposed to:

- Create a detailed photographic and drawn record of the affected area, as a basis for reinstating the masonry to closely match the present appearance.

- Brush back decayed or delaminating stones within the rough-racking matrix, and cut out failing cementitious mortar. Remove loose stones after recording with a view to restoring them in the same position
- A 2 sq. m area of rough-racking towards the haunch of the demolished vault has a large number of stone blocks which are loose and appear to need a retaining matrix. Once these are removed, a stainless steel mesh will be retained in holes drilled into the wall core and used as an armature to retain them safely. The mesh would be concealed behind the makeup of the rough-racking. Up to five stones will require drilling so that they can be connected to the mesh via steel rods that are attached to the wall core. No fixings would be made into dressed stone
- Slaister point the rough-racking in a lime mortar to match the specification used in contemporary parts of the abbey, and reinstate the removed stones in this to match existing.

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 (as amended)

- Part 1 Section 2 - Control of works affecting an ancient monument.
- Part 1 Section 2 (3) – authorises works where Scottish Ministers or Historic Environment Scotland have granted consent (scheduled monument consent) for the execution of the works where the works are executed in accordance with the terms of the consent and of any conditions attached to the consent.

Historic Environment Scotland Policy Statement

3.4. Scheduled monument consent is required for any works that would demolish, destroy, damage, remove, repair, alter or add to the monument or to carry out any flooding or tipping on the monument. It is a criminal offence to carry out any of these works without 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.

3.20. 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

The cultural significance of the aisle arcade/nave junction lies in the fact that the former relationship between the two features is made clear by the exposed wall core. This allows this part of the building to be read by non-specialists as evidence that the south aisle has been demolished at some stage. It is clearly different from the high quality red sandstone ashlar that forms the rest of the adjacent remains.

The stones that face outwards from the rough racking are modern insertions, although they are likely to be of medieval origin and reused when the monument was being consolidated. Therefore, as their intrinsic importance is of a much lesser nature than the overall appearance of the affected area.

The wall core shows the makeup of the overall fabric of the monument. However, at this location, it has already seen a significant level of disturbance during the demolition of the aisle and the consolidation of the monument in the 1930s.

Brushing back delaminating masonry will lead to a loss of facing elements of a stone, and leave a face which is more prone to further weathering. However, there is a health and safety risk to visitors which has to be mitigated. Most of the material affected belongs to phases of 1930s consolidation and it would still be possible to appreciate and understand the relationship between the former south aisle and the nave.

The insertion of the steel mesh would see the introduction of a modern material into 1930s rough racking, but would also see it attached via steel mountings into the underlying medieval wall core. The intervention into medieval material does involve some level of adverse impact, as original wall core would be lost as a consequence. The applicant has justified this as being preferable to either fencing off this part of the site or renewing the rough racking to match existing (both options would mean that there would be a risk of future masonry loss and an evolving health and safety risk). Moreover, the wall core material is not as sensitive to intervention as is ashlar or rubble built facing stones. On balance, the benefits to health and safety and long term preservation of the surrounding masonry, would seem to justify the limited level of intervention.

The slaister pointing and replacement of stones would substantially replicate the present appearance of the area of stonework, and would be based on the record taken before works commence.

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

No impact predicted on Protected Places. As noted in the accompanying Protected Places and Species Assessment, bats may be present at the monument but this particular section of walling has no crevices or voids in which they could be retained.

The absence of bats has been confirmed by a natural heritage advisor employed by HES Commercial and Tourism Directorate. While otters are present within 170m, it is highly unlikely that they would traverse a busy road or climb the high precinct wall and then forage on the lawn beside the busy car park and visitor facilities. On that basis, there would be no impact on EPS.

The site ownership has not been established. Guardianship was vested in 1927 by three owners. Neither a Registers of Scotland search nor a search by legal title researchers has identified the successors of the three owners.

d) Conclusion

Most elements of the work would not have an adverse impact on the cultural significance of the monument. The insertion of the steel mesh would have a limited direct impact on medieval wall core. However, on balance, this impact is relatively slight and would allow the rough racking to be maintained in a safe and clearly readable manner. Therefore, the proposed works represent a minimal impact on the cultural significance of the monument while providing for its long term preservation and are consistent with Policy Statement paragraph 3.16. The works are also consistent with paragraph 3.20 of the HES Policy Statement, as they have been carefully considered, sensitively designed, and properly planned and executed.

The applicant has undertaken to provide a copy of the photographic record as soon as the consolidation works are completed.

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 recommend consent is **granted without conditions.**

7. Conditions

None.

8. Approval

Officer	**John Malcolm**	**Date**	**03/08/2016**
Approved by	**John Raven**	**Date**	**10/08/2016**

Annex A – list of supporting documents

- Drawing (A4) 1:2500 Location Plan
- Drawing S Aisle Wall Masonry Consolidation Proposals 90293-150904-001B
- Annex A supporting Statement dated 05/07/2016