



Case information

Reference/Case ID	201602769		
Scheduled Monument	Na Clachan Aoraidh, stone circle 1850m WSW of Edintian		
Index no	M1572	Grid Ref	NN838620 283800.0000 762000.0000
Date of Application	16 August 2016	Application Received	16 August 2016
Summary of proposed works	An archaeological excavation to evaluate and record the damage caused by an illegal bonfire.		

1. Summary recommendation

This report recommends that approval for the excavation of Na Clachan Aoraidh, stone circle 1850m WSW of Edintian, be granted without conditions.

2. Background

The historic environment asset and its cultural significance

The site is referred to as Na Clachan Aoraidh 'the stones of worship' (Burl 1988, 187). It is located on the moorland of Meall nan Clachan some 424m O.D on the north side of Loch Tummel in Perthshire. The site was first surveyed by Coles (1908) and later by Watson (1915). The standing stones comprise four boulders forming a quadrilateral some 3.2m x 3.6m; the stones are graded with the tallest occurring in the SW corner and these are set on the circumference of a circle which is some 4.3m in diameter. The stones are set on a low mound formed from cairn material and which is roughly 16.5m x 8.85m in diameter. The platform appears to be kerbed by smaller stones, though few are these are currently visible. There is a slightly hollow in the centre of the mound, thought to be the result of undocumented activities of earlier antiquarians.

The project

An illegal bonfire has damaged the central area of the site, creating a pronounced hollow perhaps c. 1.5m in diameter. An archaeological excavation is proposed in order to evaluate the damage caused by the illegal fire pit; it will ascertain the extent and nature of surviving archaeological deposits, protect surviving features and

enhance the historic environment record. This will add to our knowledge of both the individual site and its regional context.

The **Scottish Archaeological Research Framework** highlights several key questions in regard to *Belief Systems and Ceremony in Bronze Age Scotland / Cosmology and Bronze Age Monuments*, one of which is simply ‘when exactly, and why, were ‘four posters’ built?’ One of the key research recommendations calls for a ‘more complete understanding of whole range of ‘ritual’ monuments’.

The project is envisaged as two distinct stages:

- **Stage One:** fieldwork and interim reporting (for which a budget of £10k has been set aside); and
- **Stage Two:** post-excavation analysis and final reporting

The aims and objectives of **Stage One** archaeological work are to evaluate the damage caused by the illegal fire pit and to determine the character, extent and nature of any archaeological deposits revealed. The proposed archaeological work involves the excavation of three hand dug trenches to evaluate in detail the extent and preservation of *in situ* deposits and the extent and nature of the disturbance. The proposed **Project Design** (by Argyll Archaeology) describes the objectives and methodology of the proposed work in more detail.

The applicant

The project has been commissioned by Forest Enterprise Scotland and will be directed by Clare Ellis of Argyll Archaeology and delivered by Argyll Archaeology.

Pre-application discussions

FCS provided the resources to enable HES to clarify the extent and scale of the possible damage at Na Clachan Aoraidh. It was agreed that this would be a useful case study on effects of burning on archaeological sites for future management decision making and recommended that proposals should follow policy for protection of scheduled monuments primarily through principle of minimal intervention. This application accords with these pre-application discussions.

3. Proposals

Consented works - Excavation of Na Clachan Aoraidh, stone circle 1850m WSW of Edintian.

The proposals comprise:

The exploration of three trenches.

Methodology

All trenches will be excavated by hand by professional archaeologists, 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. Excavation of specified areas (relating to the potential damage) will follow a sample-excavation strategy in order that as much of the archaeological resource is preserved in situ while ensuring that the objectives and research questions outlined in the project design are addressed.

- Exploration of a 12m x 4m trench (Trench 1), the excavation area may be reduced once the targeted archaeological features are identified. The trench has been located over two small negative magnetic anomalies which may be stone features or voids such as a cist. The trench also encompasses two of the standing stones and portion of the central hollow and a portion of the area of the illegal fire.
- Exploration of a 10m x 2.5m trench (Trench 2), the excavation area may be reduced once the targeted archaeological features are identified. The trench has been located to encompass a portion of the line of the kerb of the main monument and the possible encircling ditch, as well as a portion of the possible 'ring-ditch' and the area where the stratigraphic relationship between the two structures may be determined.
- Exploration of a 5m x 4m trench (Trench 3) to investigate the possible entrance of the main monument and will also incorporate the southern limb of the probable kerb and enclosing ditch.

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, 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.

b) Assessment

The works involve the excavation of the Na Clachan Aoraidh, stone circle 1850m WSW of Edintian in Perthshire, through the opening of three trenches.

Overview of works

This SMC application is for the excavation of three trenches to evaluate the damage caused by the illegal fire pit; it will ascertain the extent and nature of surviving archaeological deposits, protect surviving features and enhance the historic environment record.

Methodology

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

For 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 archaeological works are to evaluate the damage caused by the illegal fire pit and to determine the character, extent and nature of any archaeological deposits that survive. In addition the project will address the following aims and objectives:

The primary aims of the project are to:

1. Evaluate the damage upon the archaeological deposits caused by an illegal fire pit
2. Ascertain the extent and nature of surviving archaeological deposits
3. Ensure the continued protection of surviving features
4. Enhance the historic environmental record

The project design sets out 23 main objectives/research questions, these objectives contribute to our knowledge of the development of these sites and their role within prehistoric society. This research need has been highlighted at the level of national research agendas (e.g. SCARF).

The outputs from this work will be published in a peer reviewed paper at national level. The works will make a significant contribution to our scientific understanding of the impact of the illegal bonfire and inform the future management of the site. In addition the project will provide a greater 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 specifically addressing one of the research questions posed by ScARF is 'when and exactly why were four-posters built?' The research agenda is sufficiently robust and capable of delivering public benefits of a national level through a better understanding of the potential damage caused by the bonfire and through enhanced knowledge of this 'ritual' monument.

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

The project will be managed and undertaken by Dr Clare Ellis of Argyll Archaeology who is a long standing member of the Chartered Institute of Field Archaeologists. She will be assisted by one other experienced professional archaeologist and one assistant archaeologist. The interim report will be compiled by Dr Clare Ellis.

- (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.

The trench sizing, position, and specific justification in relation to the project aims has been set out in the project design. 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 funded by Forest Enterprise Scotland. The project design sets out that the project has a sufficient budget to deal with the archaeological deposits encountered. 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 objects drawn for publication. The 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, FCS and the local authority archaeologist. A Post Excavation Research Design will be provided 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 paper. 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 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 the extent of damage caused by the illegal bonfire, and the general increase in our knowledge the monument which, is an important archaeological site, represent a range of public benefits that are considered to be of national importance. The excavation of Trench 1 will address the extent of the damage. Trench 2 and 3 will address the core question around the development sequence for the site and will explore the nature of the overall site's history and use. 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, 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 an 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 Na Clachan Aoraidh, stone circle 1850m WSW of Edintian, is being carried out to determine the extent of damage at the site caused by illegal burning, the excavation intendeds to leave archaeological remains in situ. It can therefore be seen as the minimum works necessary to conserve what is culturally significant of the monument. Consequently, the application does meet paragraph 3.16 of the policy statement.

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 not required.

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 clearance is **granted, without conditions.**

7. Conditions

None

8. Approval

Officer	James Bruhn	Date	07/10/2016
Approved by	George Findlater	Date	10/10/2016

Annex A – list of supporting documents

- Brief for Archaeological Excavation at Na Clachan Aoraidh four poster
- MMP 1572 Na Clachan Aoraidh stone circle (FCS 2016) 690
- MMP 1572 Na Clachan Aoraidh stone circle PROJECT DESIGN (Argyll Archaeology 2016) exc costs