



Case Information

Reference/Case ID	300018546		
Scheduled Monument	Hill of Christ's Kirk, fort; The Barmkyn, fort and cairn; Cnoc Cailliche, fort 360m WSW of Upper Wheedlemont; Berryhill, enclosure 290m N of		
Index no	SM11394; SM11514; SM11681; SM12334	Grid ref	NJ 60100 27400; NJ 59900 20000; NJ 47200 26000; NJ 81700 8300
Date application validated	29 August 2016		
Summary of proposed works	Northern Picts Research Project - Evaluation Excavations		

1. Summary recommendation

This report recommends that approval for the limited excavation of the four sites outlined in this document and the project design be granted without conditions.

2. Background

The historic environment asset and its cultural significance

The Northern Picts Project aims to uncover the archaeological traces of Pictish society in northern Scotland through fieldwork and survey. To date the project has focused on major central places such as Rhynie and Dunnicaer, a silver hoard at Gaulcross and a range of other sites from Aberdeenshire to Inverness-shire. This element of the project seeks to better understand the general environs around these sites through limited excavation at four hilltop enclosed sites. In order to address the nature, chronology and social dynamics of the smaller enclosed sites of Aberdeenshire, Northern Picts aims to carry out small-scale survey and excavation of a series of stone-walled duns or palisaded sites in Aberdeenshire. Carrying out this work will provide a basic chronology for a much wider monument type that has seen little in the way of previous work. This includes four scheduled monuments that have seen no previous archaeological work:



Cnoc Cailliche, fort 360m WSW of Upper Wheedlemont (SM1168)

Wheedlemont is a small oval enclosure classified as a fort. It measures about 55m by 27m in max dimensions and is located few miles southwest of the village of Rhynie, Aberdeenshire. The fort survives mainly as ramparts with a ditch in between. There is a 3m break in the enclosure which may indicate the entrance to the fort. The ditch is about 3m wide and up to 1m deep with low earthwork inner and outer banks. The RCAHMS survey of the site records possible house platforms within, but a recent LIDAR survey does not show any conclusive interior features. The site was scheduled in 2007.

Berryhill, enclosure 290m N of (Hill of Keir) (SM12334)

An oval enclosure on the summit of the Hill of Keir consists of a stone wall measuring around 30m in diameter, the wall surviving up to 6m in thickness and 0.4m in height. There is a probable entrance (4.5m wide) on the east. No internal features are visible. No previous work has been carried out here. The site was scheduled in 2009.

The Barmkyn, fort and cairn (SM11514)

This fort, on the summit of Hill of Airlie consists of a very denuded inner rampart around 25-31m in diameter surrounded by a much more substantial stone wall around 8m in diameter which encloses the central area of c.45m diameter. An outer entrance around 4m wide survives on the southeast side of the outer wall. No work has been carried out at the site. It was scheduled in 2006.

Hill of Christ's Kirk, fort (SM11394)

The enclosures on Hill of Christ's Kirk are of a slightly different character to the sites above. The site consists of three circuits of a palisaded enclosure with the interior enclosure measuring around 21m in diameter and the outer around 55m. The inner enclosure is offset from the outer two suggesting it may be later in date. The inner enclosure encloses a similar area to the interiors of the small forts above. The site was scheduled in 2006.

The projects aims and objectives

The proposed work aims to address a series of research questions:

1. What are the dates of these small enclosed sites in Aberdeenshire and how does the chronology fit with wider regional and national patterns?
2. How might they fit within the settlement hierarchy of the Iron Age or early medieval periods?



3. What was the character of their outer 'defences'?
4. Did the defences enclose roundhouses or other settlement forms within?
5. Can we tell anything about the occupants or status of these sites from the material and architectural evidence?
6. What was the landscape setting of these enclosed sites? Were there contemporary sites in the wider landscape (assessed through desk based assessments for each site)?
7. Are these morphologically similar sites a coherent set of contemporary sites that can help elucidate enclosure typologies and dating at a wider national level?
8. Do they help fill the major settlement lacunas of first millennium AD Scotland or do they flesh out our picture of later prehistoric enclosure forms?

The applicant

The Northern Picts Project (comprising researchers from the Universities of Aberdeen, Chester, and Glasgow) involves reconnaissance survey and fieldwork at a number of sites across Northern Scotland from Aberdeenshire to Easter Ross and has led to new key evidence for the nature, chronology and importance of Northern Pictland in the emergence of the early kingdoms of Scotland. The project has a wide popular appeal, a strong social media presence, has received extensive media coverage. The overall project includes the excavation at Rhynie, where work under the auspices of the Rhynie Environs Archaeological Project (REAP) (run by the same researchers) has revealed an early royal centre for the Picts. This element of the project is part of this larger environs project.

The Northern Picts Project is supported financially by Historic Environment Scotland in 2016-17 because it helps to deliver the aims of the Scottish Archaeology Strategy, specifically:

Aim 2 - Enhancing Understanding: The Northern Picts project aims to provide a detailed consideration of a range of Northern Pictish sites that will help to characterise major power centres as well as everyday life in Northern Pictland and the rise and fall of the northern Pictish territories. Rhynie and its wider context suggests that we have the potential to reveal significant elements of the early medieval landscape at Rhynie and its long term development.

Aim 3 - Caring and Protecting: The project also has the potential to look at how the partial excavation of archaeological sites affects their long term preservation.



Aim 4 - Encouraging Greater Engagement: The project has a strong focus on community engagement, empowering them to own their history creating a vibrancy and activity in a rural community with pop up cafes, volunteer excavation, social media and creative collaboration with the Rhynie Woman group.

Aim 5 - Innovation and Skills: The project is one of the few training opportunities for University of Aberdeen and the University of Chester and will supply suitable skilled archaeologists for the future. As it is also open to volunteers it also supports learning and development of amateur archaeologists.

Pre-application discussions

The applicant submitted a draft project design on 27 June 2016, to which HES responded with significant comments on 25 July 2016. 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 - Evaluation excavations at four scheduled monuments

Northern Picts Research Project - Evaluation excavations at four scheduled monuments:

Cnoc Cailliche, fort 360m WSW of Upper Wheedlemont (SM1168)

- Excavation of a 3m x 5m trench (No 1) at the entrance to verify the presence of the proposed entrance.
- Excavation of a 2m x 2m trench (No 2) in the interior to test the interior for structural evidence. This trench will address research questions 2, 4, and 5.
- Excavation of a 6m x 2m trench (No 3) across the rampart and ditch to obtain samples for dating and provide an overall chronology of the site. This trench will address research questions 1, 3, 7 and 8.

Berryhill, enclosure 290m N of (Hill of Keir) (SM12334)

- Excavation of a section (1m x 6m) across the stone wall (No 1) to obtain samples for dating and provide an overall chronology of the site. This trench will address research questions 1, 3, 7 and 8.
- Excavation of a 2m x 2m trench (No 2) in the interior to test the interior for structural evidence. This trench will address research questions 2, 4, and 5.



The Barmkyn, fort and cairn (SM11514)

- Excavation of a section (2m x 6m) across the stone wall and interior wall line (No 1) to obtain samples for dating and provide an overall chronology of the site. This trench will address research questions 1, 3, 7 and 8.
- Excavation of a 2m x 2m trench (No 2) in the interior to test the interior for structural evidence. This trench will address research questions 2, 4, and 5.

Hill of Christ's Kirk, fort (SM11394)

- Excavation of a section (1.5m x 6m) across each of the three palisade lines (No 1, 2, 3) to obtain samples for dating and provide an overall chronology of the site. This trench will address research questions 1, 3, 7 and 8.
- Excavation of a 2m x 2m trench (No 4) in the interior to test the interior for structural evidence. This trench will address research questions 2, 4, and 5.

4. Representations received

No representations were received.

5. Report

a) Policy considerations

The application should be considered 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.

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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.

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;
- b. the avoidance of irreversible change particularly wherever its effects cannot be adequately assessed;
- c. that where change is necessary, strategies should be adopted to mitigate its impact and limit intervention;
- d. that the management and execution of alteration, including remedial work, is sympathetic to the historic character;
- e. that appropriate skills and techniques, materials and construction techniques are specified where appropriate;
- 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;
- g. that it is possible, on close inspection, to differentiate new work from old particularly on masonry structures;



- 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; 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 limited excavation of four scheduled monuments.

Overview of works

This SMC application is for the limited excavation of four scheduled monuments as part of the Northern Picts Project / Rhynie Environs Archaeological Project. While the project has been running for multiple years none of these sites have yet been excavated as part of this project. The trenches have been designed to specifically target areas to answer the established research questions.

Methodology

All trenches will be excavated by hand under the supervision of the site directors, the topsoil will be stripped back to the first archaeological horizon. All archaeological features will be carefully cleaned and recorded (hand planned at 1:20 and photographed). All turf, spoil and stone will be stored on plastic sheeting at a close location to each trench and will be fully reinstated following the excavation. All excavated contexts will be 100% dry sieved (weather permitting) and environmental samples (for soil flotation and micromorphology) taken. Environmental sampling will follow English Heritage guidance (Campbell, G, Moffett, L and Straker, V 2011). All samples will be processed and reported on by environmental specialists from the University of Aberdeen.

The trenches at each of the four sites have been designed to specifically address the set research questions in a targeted way. Consequently, the application can be seen to meet paragraph 3.16 of the policy statement but given the overall research focus of the works it is necessary to assess the project against 3.19 of the policy statement.

To comply with paragraph 3.19 of the policy statement, the application must demonstrate that it will generate public benefits of national importance which outweigh the impact on the national cultural significance of the monument. In addition, to comply with paragraph 3.20 of the policy statement the application must also demonstrate suitable methodology, planning, and execution. 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.

- Justification of principle of the works

In order to set aside the presumption against preservation in situ (through minimal intervention) the applicant must justify the principle of the works, primarily through demonstration that this cannot be done on another monument and that the works can demonstrate production of academic knowledge.

The applicant must prove that the same information which is being sought through excavation of the scheduled monument could not be found from another site that is not designated as being of national importance. In this instance, the four suggest sites form part of the larger environs of Rhynie the main site of the overall project; it is their proximity to this site and their place within the overall study area that is of key interest. I am content that the same information that is being sought through the excavation of these monuments cannot readily be found through excavation of another monument that is undesignated.

The Northern Picts project intends to gain a better understanding of the development of a range of Pictish sites that will help characterise major power centres as well as everyday life in Northern Pictland. This contributes to our knowledge of the development of complex society within the emerging Scottish kingdoms. This research need has been highlighted at the level of national research agendas (eg SCARF). The outputs from this work will be published in a peer reviewed monograph at national level. I am therefore content that 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 project aims to investigate the environs of the important early medieval centre at Rhynie. The project has provided an unparalleled opportunity to understand the context of Pictish material culture in a transformative period of Scottish history that is poorly understood.

The research agenda has therefore 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 early medieval politics and centres of royal power and consumption, addressing the rise and fall of these centres, and uncovering settlement hierarchies of the first millennium AD.



The project to date has therefore uncovered the most complete ground plan of the layout of a Pictish high status settlement with ritual dimensions that can be tied to a wider collection of Pictish symbol stones. The project now seeks to assess the major upstanding fortified enclosures close to Rhynie, with a view to providing a detailed picture of the long-term evolution of the Rhynie landscape from the Iron Age to early Medieval periods.

The wider project is also designed to facilitate and empower community engagement with archaeology and culture. Local volunteers have been involved in each season of excavation to date, and the project supports a community initiative known as Rhynie Women. These wider community aims are in line with 'Scotland's Historic Environment Strategy: Our Place in Time'.

I therefore consider 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 by an email subsequent to the application that there will be two site directors (Gordon Noble and Oskar Svienbjarnarson from the University of Aberdeen) whom all have prior experience of overseeing excavation at Rhynie. These two directors will manage all excavation on site. Experienced supervisors will be on site at all times to monitor the progress of the excavations. They will maintain a ratio of 1:3 experienced to non-experienced diggers. Volunteers and archaeology students from the University of Aberdeen will work on site under close supervision.

I consider the project team has the necessary level of experience to work on this monument.

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 research aims has been set out in the project design and has been revised following pre-application discussions with HES. A statement on sampling and post-excavation strategy has been submitted by the applicant which sets out an appropriate strategy for handling environmental sampling, artefacts, and faunal material both during and after the excavation. The project design also sets out that relevant specialists have been keyed into the project where their expertise is necessary and as such I consider this sufficient to meet industry standards.



Taking into account the level of expertise displayed by the two directors, I consider that 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 partially funded by a grant from Historic Environment Scotland in 2016-17, as well as through various funding streams associated with the Northern Picts Project. A detailed budget was subject to scrutiny by HES prior to the awarding of grant aid. As such, I consider that the project is adequately resourced.

6. Post-excavation and publication strategy

The application sets out the post-excavation programme. The 2016-17 budget for the excavation includes funds for object analysis, botanics and conservation. As mentioned above, a 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.

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. The final outcome will be an academic peer reviewed project monograph on the archaeology of the Northern Picts, and this will build on the three major journal articles and three book chapters already produced. Popular outputs for the overall project will also be produced, including local newspaper and magazine articles and web content, and an exhibition will be held in Rhynie itself, at the Tarbat Discovery Centre in Portmahomack, and at the University of Aberdeen. The project archive will remain with the University of Aberdeen until the Northern Picts Project is complete, at which time it will be housed with a relevant body. As such, I consider that 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 material will be reinstated by hand. All trenches and test pits will be reurfed using the original turf removed from each area.

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 early medieval period, 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 adverse impact of the excavation as set out above has been judged



in balance against these public benefits, and I consider that the proposals meet the public benefit test as set out in paragraph 3.19 of the policy statement.

I also consider that 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, I consider that 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, and the use of metal detecting equipment as set out in Part 3 Section 42 of the AMAA Act 1979.

The application comprises the limited excavation of a four scheduled monuments, all hilltop enclosures forms part of a wider Northern Picts . The targeted nature of the trenches precisely address the specified research questions and the proposed works and are therefore justified under 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 consent is **granted without conditions**.



7. Conditions

No conditions have been attached to this decision.

8. Approval

Case officer	James Bruhn	Date	21 October 2016
Approved by	Iona Murray	Date	21 October 2016

Annex A – list of supporting documents

- Project Design (Description of Works - Section 7 of SMC App)
- Northern Picts Project Design