Case information

Case ID	300009959
File Reference	AMJ/9273/1/1
Name of Site	Comar Wood, dun 830m SW of Comar

Local Authority	Highland Council
National Grid Reference	NH 32517 31020
Designation No. (if any)	SM13578
Case Type	Designation

Received/Start Date	29/04/2014
Decision Date	06/12/2016

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 **Comar Wood, dun 830m SW of Comar Lodge**.

2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

2.1 Designation Background

The monument is currently undesignated.

2.2 Development Proposals

There are no known development proposals.

3. Assessment

3.1 Assessment information

The site was considered for designation as part of 2014 North project and visited on 29/04/2014.

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

Comar Wood, dun 830m SW of Comar

1 Description

The monument is an enclosed dun, a form of monumental roundhouse, probably dating to the Iron Age (between 600 BC and AD 400). It is visible as the remains of a substantial stone-built structure set within a roughly circular stone enclosure. Two later buildings, of probable late medieval or post-medieval date, are built into the southeast side of the dun, and a further two against the outer enclosure wall. The monument lies on a slight terrace on the hillside overlooking Strathglass, at about 160m above sea level.

The outer enclosure, which is best preserved on the west side of the site, is roughly circular on plan. It measures around 55m in diameter within stone walls standing 0.7-1.2m high, broken by an entrance gap on the west. The dun is centrally placed within this enclosure and is almost circular on plan, measuring about 22m east-west by 24m north-south externally. The main dun wall measures around 4m in width and survives to a maximum of 1.2m in height; survey and excavation indicate the original wall height is unlikely to have exceeded 1.6m. It is broken by an entrance to the west, slightly off-set from that within the outer enclosure. Limited excavation of the site has demonstrated that the dun was of stone and timber construction, with a post-ring supporting the roof and an elaborate wooden porch and gateway structure. A substantial hearth and burnt deposits were uncovered within the centre of the dun, while a possible blocked entrance and intra-mural cell were identified within the east and north walls respectively. Evidence for structural failure and repair within the structure of the dun was also identified. The two late medieval or post-medieval buildings built into the structure of the dun are rectilinear in form, while those abutting the outer enclosure are sub-rectangular and sub-circular respectively.

The scheduled area is circular on plan, measuring 80m in diameter, to include the remains described above and an area around within which evidence relating to the monument's construction, use and abandonment is expected to survive as shown in red on the accompanying map.

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

1.1 Intrinsic Characteristics

The monument consists of the remains of a substantial dun or monumental roundhouse, originally of stone and timber construction, set within a roughly circular stone-built enclosure. Four later buildings have been built into the remains of the monument, likely re-using some of the building stone from the dun. The plan of the

dun and its surrounding enclosure wall is easily appreciable. Although the monument has been disturbed by forestry planting and has been subject to limited excavation, this has not had a significant impact on the archaeological potential of the site. Limited excavation has demonstrated that the structure is of an unusual form, built of stone and timber, with a post-ring supporting the roof and an elaborate wooden porch and gateway structure. There remains good potential for the survival of archaeological deposits, including occupation and abandonment debris, artefacts and environmental remains such as charcoal and pollen within, beneath and around the remains of the dun and enclosure. Additionally, architectural features, such as intermural galleries, cells, and entrance passages may be preserved within the structure of the dun. The buried archaeological deposits, artefacts and ecofacts have the potential to add to our understanding of settlement, land-use and environment during later prehistory, and provide information about the economy, diet and social status of the occupants and the structure of contemporary society and economy.

Such substantial roundhouses or duns are likely to be Iron Age in date. Excavation has demonstrated several phases of occupation, destruction and reconstruction; the dun appears to have been destroyed by fire on at least two occasions and there is evidence for structural failure and repair within the structure of the dun. The later structures on the site were built after the dun's final abandonment and are likely late medieval or post-medieval in date. The monument therefore had an extended development sequence. Scientific study of the form and construction of the dun has the potential to clarify the date of the remains and the development sequence at this site, and to provide information about the design, construction and development of later prehistoric settlement.

1.2 Contextual Characteristics

Although duns are found across Scotland, there are few parallels for the form of dun at Comar Wood. A number of sites within the surrounding area, including Dun Coille Struy (Canmore ID 12239), Struy Inn (Canmore ID 12333) and Dun Mor (scheduled monument ref SM4979, Canmore ID 12378), may be similar in form and construction though this could only be proven through excavation. More widely, the closest parallel for Comar Wood is a vitrified dun at Langwell in Strath Oykel (scheduled monument reference SM5302, Canmore ID 4874), Sutherland, excavated in 1973 and 1974 which had a very similar entrance passage to that at Comar and produced dates ranging from 500BC to 140AD, and a circular stone-built dun at Rahoy, Argyll (scheduled monument reference SM7810, Canmore ID 22470), excavated in the 1930s.

Comar Wood is one of a number of forts and duns constructed along Strathglass, and also forms one part of a larger cluster of later prehistoric sites in this area, including roundhouses and small cairns (Canmore ID 109911, 125102, 125107 and 125104) about 1.5km northeast. The proximity of these remains has the potential to enhance and broaden our understanding of prehistoric society and community and the development of later prehistoric settlement and economy. There is potential to study these sites together to understand their functions within the local communities, social status and settlement hierarchy in the area, as well as changing settlement patterns and systems of inheritance.

Duns are often built in strategic locations. Comar is built on the edge of a rocky knoll whose slopes fall away to the southeast, giving extensive views across Strathglass to the east and south. It may have been built here to increase its defensive potential, as a symbol of status or to better control land and movement through the area.

1.3 Associative Characteristics

N/A

2 Purpose and implications of scheduling

The field investigation concluded the site is in a stable condition and well preserved. There are few management issues other than some regeneration of vegetation. Designation as a scheduled monument is therefore the most appropriate mechanism to secure the preservation of the monument, and ensure the recognition of its national importance.

3 Assessment of national importance

This monument is of national importance because it can make a significant addition to our understanding of the past, in particular of Iron Age society and the construction, use and development of settlement in the north of Scotland. It is a good example of an enclosed dun that retains its field characteristics, with proven potential for the survival of archaeological deposits within, beneath and around the upstanding remains. As a well-preserved example of a dun, the monument can significantly expand our understanding of domestic buildings, agriculture and economy. The monument's importance is enhanced by its unusual form and its association with a wider cluster of later prehistoric remains. The loss or damage of the monument would diminish our ability to appreciate and understand the character and development of Iron Age defended settlements, as well as society and economy during this period.

4 References

Historic Environment Scotland http://www.canmore.org.uk reference number CANMORE ID 314324 (accessed on 17/03/2016).

The Highland Council Historic Environment Record reference is MHG29870 (accessed on 17/03/2016).

Birch, S. 2014 Kilmorack, Comar Wood Dun, Evaluation and survey, Discovery and Excavation in Scotland, New, vol. 14, 2013. Cathedral Communications Limited, Wiltshire, England.

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