



Case Information

Reference/Case ID	300018617		
Scheduled Monument	Whithorn Priory, monastic settlement and priory		
Index no	SM12992	Grid ref	NX 44400 40300
Date application validated	21 October 2016		
Summary of proposed works	Installation of non-groundfast perimeter fencing, surface electrical connection, access ramp and reopen former gateway in dyke for visitor access		

1. Summary recommendation

This report recommends that approval for installation of an access ramp and sweetening of the ground profile of the earthen bund for the roundhouse be granted.

2. Background

The monument comprises: the buried remains of a large Early Christian monastic settlement, founded probably in the 5th or 6th centuries AD and closely associated with St Ninian, the leading figure in the conversion of southern Scotland to Christianity; the buried remains of later Viking and medieval settlements; graves that may date from the 5th or 6th century AD to the 19th century, and; the remains of a medieval priory and cathedral that served as the pilgrimage centre for the cult of St Ninian. The west end of the medieval cathedral survives as a standing structure, while the east end is represented by buried foundations and crypts. The 'Candida Casa' or 'White House' of St Ninian represents the first ecclesiastical structure on the site, and it is generally thought that this structure is underneath the present church. The crypts and east end were the focus of medieval pilgrimage to Whithorn, and were partially reconstructed during the late 19th and 20th centuries.

The scheduled area includes all of the above remains including the development site. The modern fences and dykes on the monument are specifically excluded from the scheduling.

The monument is of national importance because it has an inherent potential to make a significant addition to our understanding of the past, in particular of early historic monastic settlements and medieval centres of pilgrimage. The site retains exceptionally complex and well-preserved archaeology and has the potential to make a very significant contribution to our knowledge of monastic layout, economy, and culture. Archaeologists have investigated a relatively small part of the site and there is high potential for other

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future discoveries. Archaeological deposits offer particular potential to illuminate the arrival of Christianity in Scotland during the 5th to 7th centuries and developments in the 9th to 12th centuries, when Northumbrian control waned and Norse and Irish cultural influence was strong. The later priory ruins are a poignant reminder of medieval Whithorn's role as a busy pilgrimage centre. The loss of the monument would significantly diminish our future ability to appreciate and understand the origins and development of early historic monasteries, their role in manufacturing, trade and exchange, and their part in the conversion of Scotland to Christianity.

These works relate to the upper (western) part of what is known as the Glebe Field, which lies to the south and southwest of the main complex that this application relates to. The application is for amenity works associated with the consented installation of the reconstructed roundhouse, which is now under construction in line with the Scheduled Monument Consent dated 24 June 2016 (SMC reference no. 201508243). It has been submitted by the Whithorn Trust.

The application is accompanied by three drawings that include method statements for the proposed work.

HES Heritage Management Directorate has undertaken pre-application discussions with the applicant regarding the scope and timing of works, and this application accords with the outcome of those discussions. Several elements of the proposal were changed after receipt of that advice, and would not now require Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) but have been included in the application. The original works received planning consent from Dumfries & Galloway Council, which has considered that the presently proposed works constitute a non-material variation to that consent.

3. Proposals

The Proposed Works Include:

- Construct an access ramp using a corduroy track, from a gap in the stone dyke dividing the upper and lower parts of the Glebe Field, to link up with the porch area of the roundhouse
- Sweeten the relatively steep profile of the earthen revetting for the concrete slab on which the roundhouse sits. This would involve adding further soil to the edge from the remains of the small spoilheap.
- Erect a non-earthfast fence with timber/willow panels inserted into the fence structure. This would protect the roundhouse from non-insurable risks. This work would not require SMC and is not discussed further below.
- The gap in the stone dyke would be used as the basis for a twin-leaf willow and reed gate, again to protect the roundhouse from unauthorised entry. The stone

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dykes are excluded from the scheduling, and this work does not require SMC and is not discussed further below.

- The placing of an armoured cable on the existing ground surface, to provide an electricity supply to the roundhouse. This work does not require SMC and is not discussed further below.

Installation of an access ramp and sweetening of the ground profile of the earthen bund for the roundhouse

The access ramp would be made up of a timber corduroy trackway placed directly on the ground surface. The corduroy timbers will be linked together by wire. While not technically earthfast, the individual timbers of the corduroy would sink into the relatively soft ground and effectively become permanent additions to the monument. This element of the work is proposed because the intended entrance to the roundhouse from the northeast (ie, from the Whithorn Trust) passed across an area of potentially soft ground and poses a risk of erosion. It would also avoid any adverse impact on the visitor experience through use of a potentially muddy trackway.

Sweetening the profile of the earthen bund supporting the roundhouse concrete slab has been proposed as the edge profile of this is relatively steep and is not yet knitted together by vegetation growth. There is a clear risk of slumping of material, which may expose the edge of the concrete slab, creating both an amenity issue as well as a potential route to erosion or shifting of the slab. This would involve the importation of fresh soil to lessen the slope on the edge of the bund – this will come from the remains of the spoilheap with some material to be imported to the site from elsewhere.

In both cases, the work would be carried out between the Christmas break and the end of the financial year. It would be carried out by the contractors responsible for the other site works.

4. Representations received

Historic Environment Scotland - The site is a property in care, and HES acts as landowner and land manager with the land leased to the Whithorn Trust. HES Conservation Directorate and Commercial and Tourism Directorate involved have raised no issues with the proposed works.

Natural environmental stakeholders - No Protected Species and Places issues have been identified, as great crested newts have been excluded from the site during construction, will not be directly affected by these works, and will be able to traverse it once these works have been completed. As a consequence, SNH have not been consulted.



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 scheduled monuments.

Historic Environment Scotland Policy Statement June 2016

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.

b) Assessment

The proposed works involve the installation of an access ramp and sweetening of the ground profile of the earthen bund for the roundhouse. This is intended to make the reconstructed roundhouse more easily accessible, and to reduce the risk of damage or disturbance to the foundations of the roundhouse.

The physical impact of the works on the monument

The access ramp/corduoy track has been proposed as there is a risk of erosion between the site access (through an existing gap in the stone dyke to the northeast of the roundhouse) and the porch of the roundhouse. The corduroy would be placed directly on the ground surface for a length of approximately 10m. No topsoil stripping is proposed, but this area (the lowest point of the construction site) is relatively damp underfoot and there is a risk of the corduroy sinking into the ground under continued loading and damaging archaeological material in and immediately beneath the topsoil. However, the movement of construction vehicles on ground protection mats in this part of the site left no rutting in the soil, so this risk should be regarded as slight in nature. In addition, erosion of the topsoil through excessive use would be likely to have an impact on subsurface remains in the longer terms, so the trackway would mitigate such a risk. On balance, the use of a corduroy track is preferable to not creating ground protection.

Sweetening the profile of the earthen bund supporting the roundhouse concrete slab has been proposed as the edge profile of this is relatively steep and is not yet knitted together by vegetation growth. There is a clear risk of slumping of material, which may expose the edge of the concrete slab, creating both an amenity issue as well as a potential route to erosion or shifting of the slab. This would involve the importation of fresh soil to lessen the slope on the edge of the bund – this will come from the remains of the spoilheap with some material to be imported to the site from elsewhere. This would

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expand the apparent footprint of the bund by a factor of about 5% of the total surface area presently occupied. As noted in our Handling Report for the initial construction SMC, the overall mass of the earthen bund, the concrete slab and the roundhouse itself would leave a 20% margin before compression of the underlying soil might occur. Therefore, the addition of this soil would still leave a significant margin and there would be no risk of further ground compression from this aspect of the work.

The potential impact on the cultural significance of the monument

The access ramp/corduroy track. The ground-penetrating radar survey carried out on behalf of HES demonstrated that the area in which the track would be located had potentially significant archaeological remains at a depth between 0.25m and 1.0m, with nothing detected at a shallower depth. This is further confirmed by the 1980s-1990s excavations, which indicated that the whole Glebe Field had remains preserved at depths greater than 0.25m. On that basis, while potential physical impact on remains in and immediately beneath the topsoil may be possible, this is very unlikely to relate to the cultural significance of the site. Therefore, it is concluded that the potential impact on the cultural significance of the monument is negligible.

Sweetening of the profile. As noted above, the additional risk of compaction of culturally significant remains is negligible. The sweetening of the profile would mean that area of the overall site which would be unavailable for further excavation would be slightly increased. This risk was regarded as slightly adverse but reversible in the original SMC Handling Report. There is presently no proposal to excavate this part of the site, and the foundations are reversible. In the case of this application, the additional impact to the cultural significance must be regarded as negligible, given that no excavation would take place in the proportionally small area beyond the edge of the consented works - unless the area under the concrete slab was also to be explored.

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

No impact on Protected Species and Places considered likely – see Protected Species and Places assessment. Great Crested Newts have been excluded from the site during construction, will not be directly affected by these works, and will be able to traverse it once these works have been completed.

d) Conclusion

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 proposed works will have a negligible impact on the cultural significance of the monument, and would not conflict with the public benefits of the overall scheme as outlined in the previous Handling Report for the consent of June 24 2016. On that basis, it is considered that the works are not in conflict with paragraph 3.16 of the HES Policy

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Statement as set out above. Therefore, it is recommended that consent be granted in accordance with the terms set out below.

No conditions are recommended for this consent. The overall works programme has to be completed by March 2017, and it is presently proposed to make a site inspection in late January or early February 2017, when these works will be underway. A final site inspection shall take place once works are complete, and this was stipulated in documents satisfying condition 1 of the June 2016 consent for the overall programme. This makes redundant the need for a notification condition for this particularly consent. No other aspects of the work would require conditions.

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.

It is recommend that consent is **granted without conditions**.

7. Conditions

No conditions have been attached to this decision.

8. Approval

Case officer	John Malcolm	Date	12 December 2016
Approved by	George Findlater	Date	13 December 2016

Annex A – list of supporting documents

1. Roundhouse drawing - reference 089:01f
2. Site Plan - reference 089: 02b
3. Proposed site section - reference 089:04d