



## Scheduled Monument Consent Report on Handling

This Report on Handling should be read with the associated Decision Notice, which provides a summary of our decision.

### Case Information

<b>Reference/Case ID</b>	300072270
<b>Scheduled Monument Index no</b>	Arbirlot, carved stone 20m S of Manse SM145
<b>Grid reference</b>	NO 60126 40422
<b>Received or validated</b>	31 July 2025
<b>Summary of proposed works</b>	Relocation of the stone from Arbirlot Manse to the new graveyard at Arbirlot Parish Church

### 1. Summary recommendation

This report recommends that consent for relocation of the Arbirlot carved stone from Arbirlot Manse for conservation and re-siting to the new graveyard at Arbirlot Parish Church be **granted with conditions**.

### 2. Background

The application is for the conservation and relocation of Arbirlot carved stone. It is being proposed in order to conserve and provide long term access to the stone, ahead of the sale of Arbirlot Manse. The church of Scotland General Trustees has submitted the application, accompanied by a location plan, plans showing the proposed new location of the stone, a conservation and removal method statement, and legal documentation outlining that the stone will remain the property of the Trustees of the Kirk of Session, which is relevant as the Manse within the grounds of which the stone is currently located has been sold to a third party.

The monument is a medieval carved stone, likely to date to between AD 850 and 1600. It is an undressed block of whinstone set vertically in the ground and measures about 1.70m high by 0.85m wide. Several motifs are inscribed on the east face of the stone. These include two small crosses with expanded arms placed towards the top and bottom of the stone and, between the crosses and to the left and right of centre, two rectangular symbols resembling open books. There is a small circle just below the upper cross. The upper book is connected with the lower cross by a zigzag line. Faint grooves run down the middle of the stone and are traversed by a horizontal feature adjacent to the lower book. The monument stands at around 45m above sea level in the garden of the Manse. The stone was found around 1836 in the foundations of the old kirk, 140m northeast of its present position, but stood in the garden of the former manse for many years before being re-sited in 1984. The scheduled area is a circle 2m in diameter, centred on the middle of the stone. It includes the stone described above and an area around that is included for the stone's support and preservation.



The monument is of national importance because it has an inherent potential to make a significant contribution to the understanding of the past, in particular the study of early medieval stone sculpture in eastern Scotland. The Arbirlot stone is in good condition and bears an unusual combination of motifs. Although not in its original location, its provenance is relatively well understood. The stone post-dates the well-known Class I and Class II Pictish symbol stones but helps to demonstrate the variety of stone carving produced in Scotland in the following centuries. Its loss or diminution would impede our ability to understand the sculpture of eastern Scotland, as well as our knowledge of the early medieval society that produced it.

The application relates to the stone itself, which is not in its original position. The stone would be removed from its current location for conservation and recording and then would be re-sited in a new location closer to its original findspot and in better environmental conditions for the long-term preservation of the monument. There are no relevant exclusions.

### 3. Proposals

The proposed works include:

- Removal of the stone from its current earthfast location
- Conservation of the stone including soil and vegetation removal, possible steam cleaning, and removal of adhering concrete from the current plinth
- Photogrammetric recording of the stone
- Installation of the stone in its new proposed location on a custom fabricated mount and epoxy resin shoe

### Works

The proposed works would involve the following:

**Removal of the Stone** - The erection of a mobile gantry would be used to support and transport the stone with a sling used to provide support during excavation. Excavation would be carried out using hand tools to expose the stone and concrete plinth, taking care not to damage the stone. If the concrete plinth remains adhered to the stone and cannot easily be removed without damaging the stone, this would be retained in place and lifted with the stone. The existing steel bracket would be removed, either unscrewing the steel bolt which secured this to the girder or using an angle grinder if corrosion has fused these together. If an angle grinder is used the stone will be protected from debris. The mobile gantry would then be used to raise the stone and lower it onto a cart with pneumatic wheels and transport into a van with either ramps or a tail lift. Transport of the stone would be via road to the Lightly West workshop in Selkirk, Scottish Borders. The excavated area would then be made good.

**Conservation of the Stone** - A detailed conservation assessment would be prepared including written documentation and photography, condition assessment of the stone and a proposal for conservation work. Conservation of the stone would be dictated by the conservation assessment but is likely to include standard conservation methods including



removal of soil deposits and biological growth using appropriate tools, steam cleaning to remove surface stains, and removal using hand tools of any concrete from the plinth still adhered to the base of the stone.

**Photogrammetric Recording** - A photogrammetric recording would be taken before and after cleaning in the workshop environment.

**Installation of the Stone in its new Location** - A custom designed and fabricated mounting system would be designed to fit the form of the stone once it was removed and measured up in full during conservation. This would enable mounting the stone for going back on display outdoors in the Arbirlot Kirkyard, with the stone sitting on an epoxy resin shoe and supported by a stainless-steel grade 316 frame with powder coated steel brackets. The resin shoe would be secured to the stainless-steel base plate with threaded fixings, with the whole structure secured with threaded fixings into stainless steel inserts incorporated into a concrete plinth built on the new site. The brackets holding the stone would be secured to the frame using A4 marine grade security screws. The concrete plinth would have a gradient to allow rainwater runoff.

Upon installation, the stone and mount would be transported to Arbirlot Kirkyard via road and transported from the car park at the Kirkyard to the installation site via a cart with pneumatic wheels through the Kirkyard. A mobile gantry would then be used to move the stone onto the mount, where it would be secured.

#### Personnel

The proposed works would be undertaken by LightlyWest, an appropriately qualified stone conservator.

#### Timetable

The proposed works would be undertaken in late summer and autumn 2025.

#### 4. Representations received

No third-party representations were received.

#### 5. Report

### 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.



## Scheduled Monument Consents Policy

### Scheduled Monument Policy Aim

A monument is included in the schedule to secure its long-term protection in the national interest, in situ and as far as possible in the form it has come down to us. The aim of this policy is to ensure this long-term protection wherever possible.

### Scheduled Monuments Principles

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 that is the primary consideration in determining applications for consent at scheduled monuments.

The principle of preserving scheduled monuments will only be set aside in circumstances where wider considerations are deemed, on balance, to be of greater importance to the national interest.

The more important particular features are to the monument's cultural significance, the greater will be the case against interventions which modify those features.

Each monument will require treatment specific to its individual nature, characteristics, significance and needs. Any proposed change to it should be fully and explicitly justified.

The management of scheduled monuments should be informed by current policy and guidance, up-to-date professional and academic research and, where appropriate, relevant consultation.

### Scheduled Monument Policy 2

Conservation and research works should always be aimed at the lowest level of intervention that is consistent with achieving a monument's preservation.

Monuments are subject to decay and the threat of destruction from natural and human causes. Conservation work may be needed to prolong the life of a monument, but there is a risk that this can be so invasive that it irreversibly modifies the monument's cultural significance and affects the features that made the monument important in the first place. These might include its character, value, evidence for construction and use, or any other factor that contributes to a monument's cultural significance.

Research projects can deliver important public benefits, improving understanding of our most important monuments. However, they can also affect a monument's cultural significance and result in irreversible loss of information for future generations. Research project works should therefore be carefully considered to ensure they are fully justified and any impact is minimised. They should be well targeted, properly researched and undertaken to high professional standards.



## Scheduled Monument Consent Policy Aim

Works on scheduled monuments should normally be the minimum level of intervention that is consistent with conserving what is culturally significant in a monument.

## Scheduled Monument Consent Policy 1

Works to scheduled monuments will normally only be permitted if they have minimal impact upon a monument's cultural significance.

## Scheduled Monument Consent Policy 3

Extensive intervention to a scheduled monument will only be allowed where:

it has minimal effect on the cultural significance of the monument.

it is clearly necessary to secure the long-term preservation of the monument.

it will clearly generate public benefits of national importance which outweigh the impact on the nationally important cultural significance of the monument. Such public benefits could come from, for example, interventions which improve public access to a scheduled monument (where appropriate), or assist public understanding once the works are completed, or provide economic benefits of national importance once completed.

unavoidable circumstances, such as coastal erosion, threaten the survival of a scheduled monument, it should, where possible, be excavated and/or recorded in detail before its destruction.

Works to scheduled monuments should be considered in terms of the cultural significance of the monument and the impact that the proposals would have upon its cultural significance. The more important particular features are to the monument's cultural significance, the greater will be the case against interventions which modify those features.

## Scheduled Monument Consent Policy 4

Proposals for change should be carefully considered, based on good authority, sensitively designed, and properly planned and executed. The level of information provided should be in proportion to the sensitivity of the monument or feature and the level of change proposed.

For all applications where change is proposed, the following factors will be taken into account when considering if works meet this policy:

- a. the use of appropriate assessment methodologies to determine the full impact of any proposed management, use or development on a monument's fabric and/or cultural significance.
- 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 and wider cultural significance.



- 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 competent archaeologists with a satisfactory record of the completion and publication of projects.
- 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.

### Scheduled Monument Consent Policy 5

Carved stones should normally be retained in their current location unless there are sound conservation reasons for moving them. If they are to be moved, any impact on cultural significance should be minimised.

Carved stones, like many other monuments or parts of monuments, often have a cultural significance which encompasses their fabric, context, setting, use, contemporary social value and their contribution to a sense of place, among other factors. Because of this there is normally a presumption in favour of retaining the physical association of these monuments with their current locality (regardless of whether or not they are in their primary or original location).

However, carved stones can sometimes be vulnerable to erosion from weathering, as well as other natural or human threats. There may therefore be sound conservation reasons to relocate them. If it is necessary to move a carved stone, it should normally be retained as close as possible to its current position, and any associations with its location should be maintained as much as feasible. The decision to move a stone to a new structure should ensure public access, long-term responsibility for continued conservation and longer-term responsibilities for maintaining any new infrastructure.

Carved Stones: Scottish Executive Policy and Guidance

### **b) Assessment**

#### **Conservation works**

The stone is currently located in an earthfast, shaded environment which is leading to moisture wicking and surface vegetation formation on the stone. Over time this has the potential to lead to delamination. It is held by an iron clamp which is likely in the future to lead to staining and possibly fracture damage to the stone in freeze/thaw cycles. The stone is directly concreted into its plinth which may also lead to formation of salts on the stone surface which could cause chemical damage.



The stone will be carefully removed from site before being cleaned and a conservation report prepared. Once agreed, the conservation works will be undertaken and the stone will be photogrammetrically recorded prior to being relocated.

The conservation works will be a positive step to improving the condition of the stone and removing the concrete plinth and iron mount which may cause future damage to it.

The lifting, transportation, cleaning and initial stabilisation of the stone would be undertaken by experienced stone conservators working to an acceptable method statement. However, further details of any treatments to be applied to the stone during initial stabilisation in the workshop are required. Consequently, a condition is required, and Condition 1 has been applied to require details of proposed conservation treatments to be approved by Historic Environment Scotland prior to being undertaken.

Condition 2 has been applied to require a timetable for works to be submitted to Historic Environment Scotland to allow a representative to visit during the removal of the stone.

The stone would be subject to a photogrammetric survey after cleaning and conservation, but no provision has been made for the submission of this survey record into a publicly accessible archive, so a condition is required. Condition 4 has been applied to require the submission of the photogrammetric survey to the National Record of the Historic Environment and the local authority archaeological service.

These elements of the proposed works are beneficial to the long-term survival of the monument and compliant with SMCP1 and 4 (subject to the aforementioned conditions)

### **Relocation and re-erection**

It is proposed to relocate the stone from its current shaded position in the grounds of Arbirlot Manse to a new position in Arbirlot Kirkyard. Arbirlot stone was first found in the foundations of the old Arbirlot Church around 1836. It is known to have been moved to the garden of the former manse, where it stood for many years before being relocated to its current position in 1984. The stone has moved as the church at Arbirlot (and its associated manse) have developed and evolved. Its current location within the grounds of the manse is part of the biography of the monument and reflects this strong link. The manse is no longer in use by the church and the desire to maintain links between the stone and the church congregation, by relocating it to the current churchyard, follows this tradition.

The proposal to move the stone to Arbirlot Kirkyard will bring the stone closer to its original find spot and enable public access to the stone to be retained. The new position will be less shaded, leading to less moisture build up and an improved overall condition.

There is a presumption in SMCP5 that carved stones should be retained in their current location unless there are sound conservation reasons for moving them. Whilst there are some conservation benefits to the proposed relocation many of these could have been achieved without relocation. Nevertheless, the stone has only been in its current location for a short period of time and overall, taking into account the strong desire for the stone to continue to have links to the congregation, continued public access and the long-term



conservation benefits the relocation will bring, the proposed relocation is in general supported by SMCP5.

The stone would be re-sited in a new location in the Arbirlot Kirkyard after cleaning, recording and conservation, but a timescale for re-siting the stone has not been provided, and consequently a condition is required. Condition 3 has been applied to require that the applicant submit a method statement and timetable to Historic Environment Scotland covering the return of the stone to either its current position in the grounds of the Arbirlot Manse, or to the proposed new location in the Arbirlot Kirkyard is re-sited the scheduling description will be updated to reflect its new position.

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

No impact on Protected Species and Places considered likely.

The applicant has ticked the box for Special Areas of Conservation on the application form, but this is in error as no SACs are present.

The GIS datasets have indicated the presence of bats in the surrounding area of Arbirlot. However, these find spot locations are outwith the monument and its proposed relocation area and so the proposed works would not impact on them.

### **d) Conclusion**

The proposed works would have minimal impact on and improve the condition of the cultural significance of the monument and comply with Scheduled Monument Consent Policy 1.

The proposed works to conserve and re-site the stone are the lowest level of intervention consistent with achieving the monument's preservation and comply with Scheduled Monument Policy 2.

The proposed works, while involving the movement of the stone to a new location, are not extensive and is the lowest level of intervention consistent with achieving the project's objective which is to conserve the stone in a more publicly accessible area on a custom designed mounting which would reduce the risk of environmental degradation of the monument. This would generate public benefits and comply with Scheduled Monument Policy 3.

The proposed works also comply with Scheduled Monument Consent Policy 5 and the Scottish Executive Carved Stones Policy and Guidance.

Conditions are required to ensure that the proposed works are fully appropriate. Conditions are required to provide a timetable for the works, to ensure that conservation treatments are fully appropriate, to ensure that the photogrammetric survey data is logged with the National Record of the Historic Environment and the local authority archaeological service, and to ensure that the stone is either returned to its current position or the proposed new site at the end of a period of 18 months.



The proposal is concluded to be broadly consistent with relevant policy. However, the proposal is not considered the minimum necessary consistent with conserving the cultural significance of the monument. There is therefore a requirement to notify Scottish Ministers as per The Scheduled Monument Consent (Notification of Applications) Direction 2015.

## 6. Recommended decision

Subject to compliance with the schedule of conditions, the works comply with scheduled monument consent policies and other relevant considerations.

I recommend consent is **Granted with Conditions**.

## 7. Conditions

1. Following completion of the conservation appraisal and conservation report, no conservation works shall be undertaken on the stones until a detailed method statement has been agreed in writing by Historic Environment Scotland. Once agreed, the conservation works shall be completed in full.

*Reason: To ensure that any conservation treatment is appropriate for the long-term preservation of the stone and executed in full.*

2. Not less than 2 weeks before any works requiring scheduled monument consent begin, Historic Environment Scotland shall be informed in writing of the timetable for the proposed works. Historic Environment Scotland will be informed in writing of any changes to the timetable prior to the works being carried out.

*Reason: to enable a representative of Historic Environment Scotland to visit the monument and monitor the removal of the stone while works in progress.*

3. Within 18 months of the commencement of works on site, the applicant shall submit to and have approved in writing by Historic Environment Scotland a method statement and timetable covering the return of the stone to either its current position in the grounds of the Arbirlot Manse, or to the proposed new location in the Arbirlot Kirkyard.

*Reason: to ensure that the long term future of the stone at or near its current site is adequately addressed.*

4. Within 4 weeks of undertaking the photogrammetric survey, the applicant will deposit the survey material with the Historic Environment Scotland Archives (contact email [archives@hes.scot](mailto:archives@hes.scot)) and copied to the Aberdeenshire Council Archaeology Service ([archaeology@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:archaeology@aberdeenshire.gov.uk)). Confirmation of the deposition of this record shall be forwarded to the Heritage Directorate of Historic Environment Scotland.

*Reason: to ensure the photogrammetric record is placed in a secure, publicly accessible archive*



## 8. Approval

**Case officer** Tom Gardner  
**Date** 11 September 2025

**Approved by** Ann MacSween  
**Date** 23 September 2025

## Annex A – list of supporting documents

- Location Plan [Copy plan of current location]
- Proposed New Location [Copy plan of new location; Copy new site plan (location marked X)]
- Removal and Conservation Method [Method Statement from LightlyWest]
- Statement on Need for Planning Permission [Copy emails from Derek Lamond]
- Missive on Legal Ownership of Stone [Copy missive letter]
- Confirmation of Legal Ownership [Confirmation by owners of Manse]