



<b>Case reference</b>	SMC-ORK-002
<b>Application details</b>	Research excavations affecting two separate scheduled monuments
<b>Site address</b>	Knowe of Swandro, mound 400m SSE of Skail, Westside (SM 1310) and Westness, Viking houses, noost and graveyard (SM 3534), Rousay, Orkney
<b>Applicant</b>	University of Bradford
<b>Determining Authority</b>	Historic Environment Scotland (HES)
<b>Local Authority Area</b>	Orkney Islands
<b>Reason(s) for notification</b>	Notification Direction 2015 – works to be granted Scheduled Monument Consent by <b>Historic Environment Scotland</b> go beyond the minimum level of intervention that is consistent with conserving what is culturally significant in a monument
<b>Representations</b>	Nil
<b>Date notified to Ministers</b>	8 June 2018
<b>Date of recommendation</b>	20 June 2018
<b>Recommendation</b>	Clear

### Description of Proposal and Site:

- Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) is sought for full archaeological excavation and recording of the Knowe of Swandro, a Neolithic chambered burial cairn which is being actively eroded by coastal erosion due to its seashore location. The cairn occupies a small central area and is completely surrounded by the immediately adjacent scheduled monument of the Viking/Norse settlement of Westness. A small section of the Westness monument is also affected by the proposed excavations. These excavation works have been combined in this consent to cover both designations. The monuments are located on the shore of the west coast of the island of Rousay, Orkney and extend onto the exposed beach.
- The monuments are nationally important because they contain rich archaeological remains that have the potential to contribute to our understanding of early prehistoric tombs, the re-use of those tombs in later periods and the adoption of Pictish estate centres by Norse settlers.

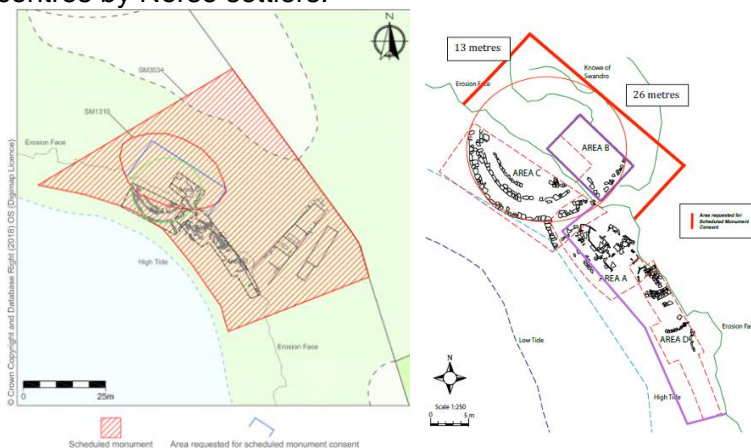


Fig. 11. Photogrammetric plan of Area B, showing the top of stone work associated with the cairn.

## **Consultations and Representations:**

- No representations were made during consideration of the application.
- PAD consulted SG Culture and Historic Environment Division following notification and they have no comments to make on the proposal.

## **Assessment:**

1. HES are minded to grant SMC for archaeological excavation of the cairn and a section of adjacent settlement in advance of destruction by the sea (as indicated above). This follows previous evaluation trenching undertaken between 2010 and 2016 to assess the effects of coastal erosion and to identify the types of deposits being exposed and destroyed.
2. The application has been submitted by University of Bradford (School of Archaeological and Forensic Sciences) in partnership with the Swandro-Orkney Coastal Archaeology Trust and the Archaeological Institute of the University of the Highlands and Islands. Local volunteers will be encouraged to participate and lectures and open day events will engage the community and provide an attraction for tourists and visitors. The applicants have received HES support and additional funds have been raised by grants from Orkney Islands Council, the Swandro-Orkney Coastal Archaeology Trust, training fees from US students and support from the University of Bradford.
3. The project aim is to understand the chronology, construction and complex life history of the Neolithic cairn in its landscape. This is a rare opportunity to investigate a Neolithic tomb which has not been the subject of extensive antiquarian activity and to understand both the original monument, its deposits and later Iron Age activity in and around the monument. Evidence from beach deposits indicate there may also be an earlier pre-tomb phase to the site, with stone and midden layers under the foundations. The Iron Age and Viking Age components of the site provide important evidence for settlement continuity and change, with evidence spanning a millennium.
4. The submitted Research Strategy contains a clear description and assessment of the threat to the monuments which is based on the results of the 2010-2016 seasons of evaluation work. The western half of the structure of the tomb is exposed on the beach where soft deposits are being eroded and the structure is being relatively quickly destroyed by the action of tides, waves and storms. While the eastern half of the tomb is not exposed on the beach at the moment it can be predicted that when the western half of the monument has been lost it will become immediately vulnerable to erosion.
5. HES believe exposing, cleaning and recording the tomb would leave its structure intact but allow a record to be made of its form prior to its loss. It is clear that rescue excavation is the only viable option to record archaeological remains associated with this tomb prior to imminent loss. The works have been carefully designed to include the minimum excavation required to provide a reasonable level of record of the remains being eroded. If the works were not undertaken now, the remains would be lost without an adequate record. It is concluded that these works respond positively to policy because they allow for the recording of a monument before its unavoidable destruction by coastal erosion.
6. The applicants confirm that the proposed work is to be broken down into two periods of excavation during 2018 and 2019. This multi-season approach allows for a period of research consolidation and reflection followed by formulation of responses and

adaptation of methodologies based on the previous season's findings in order to maximise the archaeological potential of the site.

7. In terms of the impact on protected species and places, the works would be adjacent to the North Orkney Special Protection Area (SPA). Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) have been consulted by the applicant and their response confirmed that the proposals are unlikely to damage the protected natural features and bird/animal life in the SPA.
8. HES consider the works would provide a detailed record of archaeological remains within the monument, which are a principal component of its cultural significance. These remains would otherwise be lost without record and therefore the proposed works cannot be judged to have a negative impact on the monument's cultural significance because they are in response to an unavoidable natural threat. Therefore HES believe the works are supported by a robust archaeological research framework and that the rescue excavation is justified in accordance with paragraph 3.17 of their Policy Statement 2016.
9. In summary, HES consider the proposal is not considered the minimum necessary consistent with conserving the cultural significance of the monument, but it is justified as it responds positively to an unavoidable natural threat and provides other public benefits as set out in sections 3.19 and 3.21 of their Policy Statement. The application also meets paragraph 3.20 because it has been demonstrated that the works have been carefully considered, based on good authority, sensitively designed and properly planned. No conditions are considered necessary as the application meets all professional expectations.
10. In conclusion, this SMC application does not raise any issues of national importance that would merit intervention by Ministers.

**Recommendation:**

- The application should be cleared back to Historic Environment Scotland to issue Scheduled Monument Consent.