



Case reference	SMC-ORK-001
Application details	Archaeological Investigation
Site address	Chambered cairn at S end of Tres Ness, Sanday, Orkney (SM 1330)
Applicant	University of Central Lancashire
Determining Authority	Historic Environment Scotland (HES)
Local Authority Area	Orkney Islands
Reason(s) for notification	Notification Direction 2015 – works to be granted Scheduled Monument Consent by Historic Environment Scotland go beyond the minimum level of intervention that is consistent with conserving what is culturally significant in a monument
Representations	Nil
Date notified to Ministers	Notified on 5 June 2018 but no access to portal until 6 June 2018
Date of recommendation	26 June 2018
Decision / recommendation	Clear

Description of Proposal and Site:

- Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) is sought for the excavation, recording and reinstatement of a trench at Tres Ness chambered cairn, Sanday, Orkney. The cairn is a funerary monument likely to have been used during the Neolithic period (from around 4000 BC to 2500 BC) located on the seashore. The scheduled area is circular and covers the mound and tomb which is shaped like a broch.
- The monument is of national importance because it is an upstanding prehistoric funerary monument, that has high potential to contain archaeological remains that could provide information on the prehistoric societies that built and used it. The tomb is suffering from coastal erosion to the south which has exposed the end of the tomb's passage.



Figure 1 - Photogrammetry at Tres Ness in 2017 showing the eroding coastal section from previous excavation and Figure 2 - Location of the trench and the scheduled area (from submitted project design)

Consultations and Representations:

- No representations were received by HES during their consideration.
- PAD consulted Scottish Government Culture and Historic Environment Division following notification and they have no comments to make on the proposal.

Assessment:

1. Historic Environment Scotland (HES) are minded to grant consent for archaeological excavation at Tres Ness. However, the proposed works along with related ground disturbance are not considered the minimum necessary consistent with conserving the cultural significance of the monument. This is a significant departure from policy as set out in 3.16 of HES's Policy Statement 2016.
2. The works are part of the wider 'Tombs of the North' project being undertaken by University of Central Lancashire and the which will run over five years. The project entails new archaeological research at selected chambered tombs in Orkney. It is intended to enable the creation of 'tomb trails' for the public, conjoining a number of monuments which are currently rarely visited.
3. The application for the proposed works follows evaluation trenching which was granted consent in 2017. The proposal adopts a staged approach to open up a larger trench over the chambered tomb incorporating the western half of the monument (figure 3). Work would initially commence with excavation and recording of those parts of the monument that are being actively eroded by costal processes, including the chamber which is suffering water ingress. The initial area of excavation would be extended to Areas B and C if required, but HES would be consulted on-site before this happens and would ensure that the minimum amount of work required on the monument is carried out.

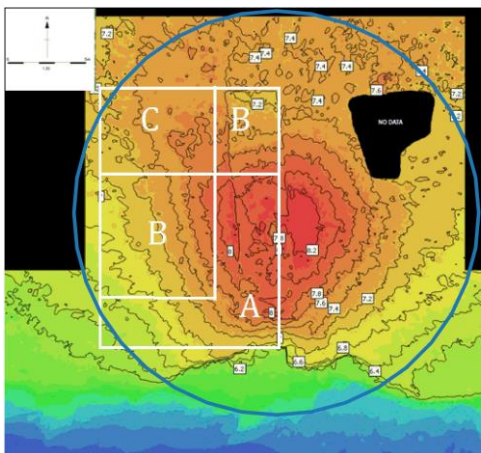


Figure 3 - Proposed phases of excavation (from submitted project design)

4. The physical impact of the proposed works would affect roughly half of the monument if the project was to reach its maximum extent. Turf and topsoil would be removed by hand. Based on the evaluation results, this is expected to expose the extant masonry of the tomb. This would then be cleaned to assess the nature of the archaeology. HES highlights that although the proposed works

would increase the understanding of the monument and that the form of the monument would be reinstated following excavation, the archaeological remains within this half of it will be destroyed. As this would significantly reduce the cultural significance of the monument it must be assessed as an extensive intervention.

5. HES do highlight that the monument is undergoing coastal erosion along the exposed section. The proposed works are consistent with paragraph 3.21 of the policy statement, where it states that in unavoidable circumstances, such as when coastal erosion threatens the survival of a scheduled monument, it should where possible, be extracted and recorded in detail before its destruction. This is also consistent with Scottish Coastal Archaeology and the Problem of Erosion's Coastal Heritage at Risk Project which assesses the site as a medium priority, that is very vulnerable to coastal erosion and recommends further study to further understand the site.
6. Similarly, HES consider that the chamber of the monument, which is the most important component of its cultural significance, may contain very vulnerable archaeological remains is suffering water ingress. Therefore, archaeological excavation and recording of it, would rescue the information preserved within it, before it is lost.
7. HES also highlight that one of the objectives of the project is to obtain precise dating for the monument to enhance the understanding of the Orcadian chambered tomb sequence. This would also contribute to wider research aims as this is one of the priority research questions for the Orkney area set by the Scottish Archaeological Research Framework (ScARF).
8. Overall, HES acknowledge that the physical impacts of these works on the monument and its cultural significance would be significant and extensive. However, they consider that the proposed works have a public benefit, promote archaeological tourism in the Orkney Isles, and contribute to significant archaeological research before it is lost to coastal erosion. They believe the application accords with sections 3.17, 3.18, 3.19 and 3.21 of their Policy Statement 2016 because it has largely been demonstrated that the works have been carefully considered, based on good authority, sensitively designed and properly planned.
9. HES have set two conditions to ensure that there are clear mechanisms in place for clarifying the extent of the excavation and requiring post-excavation analyses, reporting and timetable.
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 with two conditions.