



Case reference	SMC-ZET-001
Application details	Evaluation and targeted excavation of coastal stack settlement under threat from coastal erosion
Site address	Kame of Isbister, settlement, Burravoe, Shetland
Applicant	University of Aberdeen
Determining Authority	Historic Environment Scotland (HES)
Local Authority Area	Shetland Islands Council
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	28 May 2020
Date of recommendation	21 July 2020
Decision / recommendation	Clear

Description of Proposal and Site:

- The monument comprises the summit of a large rock stack, which juts out into the Yell Sound from the Shetland Mainland. On the top of the stack are the grassed-over remains of buildings believed to date to the first millennium AD. The stack is now connected to the mainland by a knife-edge ridge.
- The monument is of national importance as an exceptionally well-preserved stack site, one of a series in a varied group found across Shetland and Orkney.
- Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) is sought by the University of Aberdeen for the excavation of five trenches over three parts of the stack. The proposal aims to extract samples of in situ deposits with a view to establishing a clearer chronology for the monument through post-excavation analyses. The proposals also include the careful reinstatement of any walls removed, with masonry keyed in to that left *in situ*, and if necessary, grass reseeding.



Figure 1: Location plans

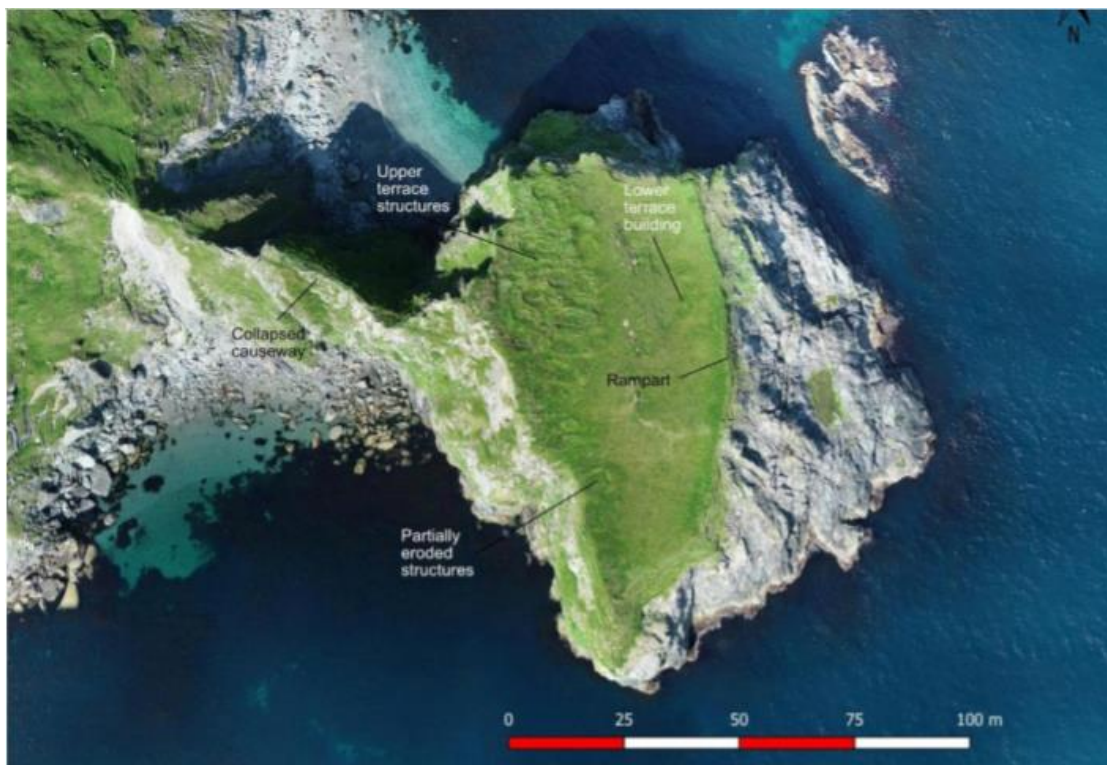


Figure 2: Annotated aerial view of the Kame of Isbister settlement

Consultations and Representations:

- No third party representations were received.
- PAD consulted the Scottish Government's Culture and Historic Environment Division (CHED) who advised that the proposal does not appear to raise any specific issues of national importance.

Assessment:

1. Historic Environment Scotland (HES) has concluded that the proposal is broadly consistent with relevant policy and intends to grant consent. However, they consider that the proposal is not considered the minimum necessary consistent with conserving the cultural significance of the monument. HES has therefore notified Scottish Ministers of its intention to grant consent, as required by The Scheduled Monument Consent (Notification of Applications) Direction 2015.
2. HES considers that the proposed works would have an extensive impact on the cultural significance of the monument, but that this would be mitigated by the public benefit provided by the archaeological information recovered. HES also notes that the proposed works would involve controlled archaeological excavation for the purposes of research and are the lowest level of intervention consistent with achieving the project's objective. They have been clearly justified as having public benefits including helping to answer key research questions about the nature of Pictish-Viking relations in Shetland and its place within Scotland more widely; disseminating the improved understanding of Scotland's coastal heritage through social media streams, and publishing the results in academic and popular formats.
3. Whilst HES considers the works as extensive, and therefore not compliant with Scheduled Monument Consent Policies 1 and 2, they consider the works would generate public benefits outweighing the physical impacts on the monument. The works would also allow for the recovery of archaeological material at risk from ongoing coastal erosion. The proposed works are therefore considered to comply with Scheduled Monument Consent Policy 3.
4. The proposed works are carefully considered, based on good authority, sensitively designed and properly planned and to be properly executed. The works therefore comply with Scheduled Monument Consent Policy 4.
5. The consent would be subject to a condition requiring HES to be notified of the timetable for the works.
6. CHED advises that the proposal does not appear to raise any specific issues of national importance, and offers a chance to record archaeological information before climate change erodes the site further. It also offers additional intelligence in terms of understanding the monument as the project aligns with the Scottish Archaeological Research Framework (ScARF) which identifies greater understanding of the relationship between the Picts and the Viking as a major national research question. There will be expert archaeological monitoring during the works, and the opportunity for effective social media engagement increases the community value of the proposal.
7. In summary, the SMC application does not raise any issues of national importance that would merit intervention by Ministers.

Decision/Recommendation:

- The application should be cleared back to Historic Environment Scotland to grant scheduled monument consent.