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MANAGING CHANGE IN THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

Castles and Towerhouses

May 2017





Above: Castle Tioram, Highland. Consideration of the most appropriate method of preserving the cultural significance of a castle for the future will involve a discussion on the merits of consolidation versus restoration. Each case is considered on its own merits. © Peter Drummond.

Cover image: Eilean Donan Castle, Highland. Eilean Donan was a casualty of war in 1719, and remained abandoned until restoration by Lt Col John Macrae-Gilstrap, 1911-32, in keeping with the original medieval character. Today Eilean Donan is one of Scotland's most recognisable castles and is a significant tourist attraction. © Crown Copyright: Historic Environment Scotland.

‘MANAGING CHANGE’ IS A SERIES OF NON-STATUTORY GUIDANCE NOTES ABOUT MANAGING CHANGE IN THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT. THEY EXPLAIN HOW TO APPLY GOVERNMENT POLICIES.

The aim of the series is to identify the main issues which can arise in different situations, to advise how best to deal with these, and to offer further sources of information. They are also intended to inform planning policies and the determination of applications relating to the historic environment.

INTRODUCTION

This note provides guidance for anyone considering a castle consolidation or restoration project, such as owners, local authorities or other interested parties. It sets out the principles that apply to works on castles and towerhouses, and helps guide decision-making on consent for applications relating to castles.

Although castles can still be resilient structures centuries after they were built, some require physical intervention to enable their historic value and importance to be retained, especially in the face of climate change. There is a long tradition of successful castle consolidation (preserving the current state of the building) and restoration, but these projects can be very complex. High-quality project-planning with appropriate investment can deliver a sustainable future for more of these prominent and distinctive structures.

This guidance aims to encourage sensitive works that respect the value of these buildings and secure their cultural importance for the future.

Works to scheduled monuments or listed buildings require scheduled monument or listed building consent before being carried out, in addition to any requirement for planning permission. For advice on this, See [*Historic Environment Scotland's website*](#).



Law Castle, North Ayrshire. Restoration of the 15th Century Law Castle in the 1980s required a series of considered interventions such as the installation of a new roof and partial re-building of the parapet. The existing window openings were re-used, avoiding the need for new openings. A harling was also applied to the restored building. Top: © John Buchanan Smith/Scottish Castles Association. Bottom: © Crown Copyright: Historic Environment Scotland.

KEY ISSUES

1. Castles are a central part of Scotland's heritage and identity. They dominated Scotland's elite secular architecture for centuries until the country house became more popular. Castles can enhance people's local environment, and they are a powerful attraction for visitors. They also contain important information about past lives and society.
2. Owing to their importance, many castles are designated as scheduled monuments or listed buildings.
3. Where work to a castle is proposed, it is essential to understand from the outset what the castle's important features are: what gives it its cultural significance, or special interest.
4. Proposals to consolidate or restore a castle should be planned to protect its significance or special interest. National policy is that any work should be sensitive and safeguard the continued importance of the building for the future.
5. Research is essential to the development of any project. Recording standing buildings and buried archaeological remains is usually necessary, both to avoid loss of information and to inform the works to be done.
6. Informed project management from inception to completion is crucial. Professional advisors can identify risks and costs and suggest appropriate designs and methods. Early consultation with the local planning authority and Historic Environment Scotland is always recommended.

I. WHY ARE CASTLES IMPORTANT?

Scotland is internationally renowned for its castles. Whether ruined or in use, they are a central part of our heritage and identity. They help to make Scotland's landscapes distinctive.

Castles play a significant role in the modern world, enhancing the environments and lives of people, and attracting and educating visitors. They contribute to the quality of our places and landscapes, and can be a valuable and engaging educational resource.

Borthwick Castle, Midlothian. The surviving fabric of a castle can often contain evidence of past events which add considerable interest to its cultural significance. The damage seen on the east elevation of Borthwick Castle is believed to have been caused by Oliver Cromwell's cannons in 1650. Although the castle was restored in the late 19th century this important historical feature was recognised and retained.

Castle sites can also contain detailed information about past societies, daily life, architecture and building techniques, from the medieval period onwards. This evidence may exist within the masonry of the castle, or may lie beneath the ground as buried archaeological remains.

The importance of castles is recognised by the designation of many as scheduled monuments or listed buildings. For further information, see [Historic Environment Scotland's website](#).



2. CONSOLIDATION OR RESTORATION? PRINCIPLES FOR DECISION-MAKING

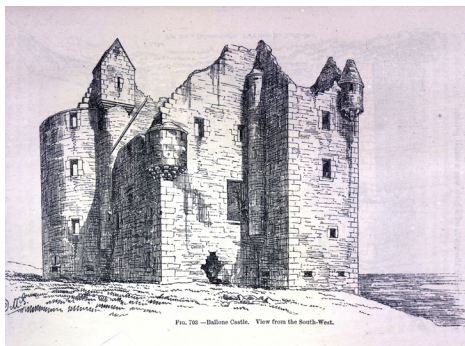
When works to a historic castle are planned, the key aim should be to safeguard it for the future. Castles are usually designated as scheduled monuments or listed buildings, which includes an obligation to preserve their cultural significance or special interest and character. If a castle has been designated it will be important to develop a firm understanding of what qualities led to its being designated.



Sinclair Girnigoe Castle, Highland. A complex scaffolding system was required to stabilise a free-standing chimney stack at Sinclair Girnigoe Castle. This allowed masonry repairs to be carried out in a safe manner and provided protection during these works for archaeologists carrying out excavations underneath the stack.
© Bill Fernie (www.caithness.org)

Above: Lochore Castle, Fife. A programme of consolidation works to the tower and barmkin walls of Lochore Castle included vegetation removal and masonry repairs. No significant alterations were required in order to consolidate the building, which has been safeguarded for future enjoyment by future generations. © Historic Environment Scotland.





Above: Ballone Castle, Highland. Ballone Castle was recorded in the 1880s by David MacGibbon & Thomas Ross, and later photographed in the 1930s. This historic record of the castle enabled the informed restoration of some missing architectural elements. The stair turret cap-house illustrated by MacGibbon & Ross (lost by the 1930s) was re-instated as part of the restoration project.

Top left: from David MacGibbon and Thomas Ross: *The Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland from the twelfth to the eighteenth century*. Top right: © Crown Copyright. Right: © John Buchanan Smith/Scottish Castles Association.



In some cases consolidation will be the best way to preserve the appreciation and understanding of a castle, while in other cases restoration may be a more sustainable and valid approach. This section sets out principles to consider when deciding which approach is more appropriate.

Consolidation projects seek to preserve structures as far as possible in the state they survive in, while restoration projects seek to return structures to an earlier condition that allows active use. There is no general presumption in favour of either approach. Each proposal should be considered on its merits, referring to relevant Historic Environment policy.

Different policies apply for castles which are scheduled and those which are listed.

For scheduled monuments, policy states that works should normally involve the minimum level of intervention that is consistent with conserving what is culturally significant in the monument.

Extensive intervention is only envisaged where it is clearly necessary to secure the longer-term preservation of the monument, or where there would be public benefits of national importance – perhaps relating, for example, to access, understanding, the wider community, or wider economic benefits.

For listed buildings, works that would adversely affect the building's special interest should also be avoided. However, alteration and adaptation will sometimes be necessary to bring a building into beneficial use, and in most cases this should be achievable without damaging the building's special interest.

This means that for a scheduled monument there would normally be more emphasis on conserving its existing form, and for a listed building more emphasis on restoration or adaptations to enable modern use.

Despite the differences of approach, both policies emphasise the key need to avoid impacts that would diminish their cultural significance or special interest – that is, the need to protect the qualities that justify the castle's designation. Section 3 below gives advice on how this significance or interest can be identified and understood.

Other important considerations concern the physical condition of a castle, particularly whether there is sufficient surviving information to allow for an accurate restoration without speculation about the castle's original form. Where there is insufficient evidence to inform complete restoration, there may be scope in some circumstances to augment the historic structure using modern materials and design – but this would have to be carefully considered.

The internal layout of castles reflects their original purposes and constitutes an important part of their character and significance. This means restorers should match their expectations and proposals to what the individual castle can readily deliver. For instance, large, well-lit rooms may be difficult to achieve within the confines of a towerhouse; and floor space may be restricted compared with modern expectations.

In reviewing options for a castle's future, it may be relevant to consider whether its current management is sustainable, how improved management could be delivered to sustain its current state, or whether restoration should be viewed as an opportunity to ensure its long-term preservation. It is important to weigh up how different options might preserve or compromise the castle's significance. What are the current and foreseeable risks to the castle's condition? And what is the possibility of alternative approaches emerging in the foreseeable future – ones that would result in less physical change?

In any project there is usually more than one option to consider. The case for change is likely to be stronger where all options have been explored in order to identify the approach that would have least impact on the building's significance.

3. IDENTIFYING THE INTEREST IN A HISTORIC CASTLE

In order to safeguard a castle's future it is important to first understand what contributes to its cultural significance or special interest and character.

The particular qualities of a castle which contribute to its cultural significance or special interest will vary. They may include the physical evidence of the past preserved in the fabric of standing buildings or below ground; the architectural styles that are visible, and the ability to 'read' and understand the structure; the phases of the building's development; its authenticity; its potential rarity; if it remains intact, unencumbered by modern development, or was adapted in ways that contribute to its continued importance; associations with important personalities, stories or families; its contribution to its surroundings; or the ability for the wider community to enjoy and appreciate the monument.

Sometimes, the highlighted qualities of a castle may include its ruined state – for example, where the castle ruin was exploited as part of a picturesque view. The castle's condition may allow many building phases to be visible, giving understanding of the structure's past use, evolution and form. Its present form and fabric may derive from specific historical events; it may have widely recognised aesthetic attributes, perhaps celebrated in works of art; or it may have particular significance to people who use or have used the monument.

Working with professional advisors to understand the existing structure and its immediate surroundings is recommended before starting to plan restoration or consolidation work.

This will normally include conducting historical/ archival research, and considering buried archaeology as well as upstanding masonry.

Castles are often multi-phase, developing in several building episodes from an initial core to reach their final form. It will be important to identify and respect each phase, and it may be appropriate to keep various phases visible, rather than presenting the building as a single-phase structure.



Above: Barholm Castle, Dumfries and Galloway. While originally a simple rectangular towerhouse, characteristic of lowland Scotland, the moulded window detailing to the later stair tower adds to the castle's historical and architectural interest. These features were successfully incorporated into the residential restoration completed in 2006.

4. PLANNING A PROJECT

Effective and informed project management from inception to completion is crucial. It cannot be over-emphasised that projects can founder where the scope of works, their timescale, or their cost, is under-estimated. For example, ruinous structures which initially appear restorable can, after detailed analysis, require major unforeseen capital expenditure to ensure stability.

Rigorous assessment should therefore be undertaken to establish costs based on best- and worst-case scenarios, before making any commitment to start a restoration or consolidation project; to ensure that the project can achieve its aims and be completed.

It is normally helpful to prepare at the outset a feasibility study to consider all the options and demonstrate the sustainability of each. This may lead to a full conservation plan, setting out the background and aims of the work, the planned stages of implementation, and how they will be managed.

Successful consolidation and restoration projects are based on a strong understanding of the castle and its significance. This understanding can only develop through two complementary strands of research: analysing the physical evidence (in the building and surrounding structures and earthworks); and consulting documentary sources



(archive documents, maps and drawings held in local or national resources, and publications).

Any applicant will need advice from appropriate conservation professionals who can help understand and explore the issues. The core team is likely to include a conservation architect, a research team comprising an architectural historian and an archaeologist, a structural engineer, and later a building contractor with appropriate experience. Effective overall project management is also critical, to control co-ordination, delivery of agreed outcomes, the timetable, and costs.

It is always beneficial to undertake early discussions with the planning authority and Historic Environment Scotland. This will clarify what consents are likely to be required and help guide project planning.

If the success of a project is dependent on acquiring grant aid, enquiries at an early stage are essential to establish in principle if this may be available and, if so, its likely extent.

In some cases castles will have lost their ancillary buildings. Many of the courtyards once associated with towerhouses are now gone. A proposal to restore or reconstruct ancillary buildings would need to respect the main building and its historic setting, be of appropriate scale, and take account of impacts on historic fabric both above and below ground. The chosen design may be based on clear historical evidence, or in some cases a modern design distinct from the historic fabric might be appropriate.

If restoration is planned, the installation of services and their integration into the building's structure without compromising its historical integrity should be considered at the early design stage. There will be added costs in bringing services (perhaps over considerable distances). Where rights of access and wayleaves are not included in a property's existing titles, legal advice should be sought.

Applicants should find out about the timescales involved in obtaining statutory consents, which may include planning permission, scheduled monument consent and/or listed building consent. Much is dependent on the individual case and the level of information and research submitted. Lack of detailed information can extend the process. Building warrant relaxations may also be required.

Abandoned, uninhabited ruins often provide habitats for wildlife, which may include protected species. It may therefore be necessary to undertake ecological surveys to establish if this is the case; and, if so, how impacts could be avoided or mitigated, and whether any relevant consents can be obtained. The best source of advice regarding wildlife is [*Scottish Natural Heritage*](#).

5. ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION AND RECORDING

A castle and its wider site are likely to be archaeologically sensitive, both in terms of building fabric and buried archaeology. The project may reveal – and sometimes destroy – physical remains that can enhance understanding of the site. Therefore, it is important that any such evidence is professionally recorded and the results made publicly available. The findings may also help inform the project's design.

Recognising this, permissions from either Historic Environment Scotland or the local planning authority are likely to come with conditions that require the applicant to commission, and pay for, a programme of archaeological work. This can include survey, excavation, building recording and analysis, and reporting.

Buried archaeology can introduce unexpected costs and delays during site works if the potential is not identified at an early stage. This is best addressed by employing an archaeologist to undertake surveys, recommend mitigation, or trial excavations. However, it is only necessary to excavate areas that would be affected by potential works and it is best practice to preserve archaeological remains intact, wherever possible. By using the results of evaluation it is often possible to adjust plans to reduce or eliminate impact on archaeological remains and the associated costs. At a scheduled monument, impacts on buried archaeology should be restricted to what is demonstrably necessary for the project's completion.

6. THE CONSERVATION PROCESS

It is important to consider how new stonework or other materials will interact with the existing structure. New masonry will be visually distinctive at first but may become less so over time. Materials should be sympathetic to the existing structure, but consideration should be given to making new work identifiable on close inspection.

Where carved or dressed masonry around fireplaces, doors or windows is to be installed or replaced, the design for missing parts should be based on evidence from the building itself or archival evidence. Where no such evidence exists, and where appropriate, it may be advisable to aim for clearly identifiable, perhaps simple and/or modern detailing that self-evidently avoids conjecture.

Stone used for repair and restoration should match the colour and weathering characteristics of existing fabric. It is also important to use a compatible lime mortar; cement mortar prevents moisture movement, is hard, cracks, and is usually unsuitable in historic buildings.

Masonry surfaces in castles were often harled, to create a uniform appearance over rubble walls and to provide weather-proofing. Coats of limewash were sometimes applied over the harl, with or without a coloured pigment.

There is ongoing debate over the extent of harling in the past, and a decision on whether to harl should be made on a case-by-case basis, in the light of relevant evidence, and any effect on cultural significance. Harl and limewash can continue to protect against the elements, potentially important in a time of increasing rainfall, but they can also change a building's character and conceal important architectural details. Where harl is to be applied, it is advisable to employ a mason with proven successful experience in harling. Harl, as with limewash, will require regular maintenance.

Timber forms an important part of many structures and, where present, it should be retained as much as possible. Fungal or woodworm decay can be treated, and a well-planned restoration should normally avoid the removal of historic timbers.

The masonry to be consolidated or restored is likely to be saturated and will start to dry out as the project progresses. The client and architect will need to consider this, if they are planning to introduce new timber or plasterwork into the structure.

Whether consolidation or restoration is planned, wall heads and wall walks will require careful weather protection to minimise erosion. Historically, rainwater was usually shed using spouts or overhanging eaves.

However rainwater is managed, it is important to avoid concentrating discharge on one particular area of building fabric or piece of ground near the wall base.

When considering internal changes, the existing plan should be respected wherever possible, for example by using existing door openings.

The installation of services requires careful consideration to minimise the disruption they might cause to both the

thick walls of the structure and buried remains within and around it. Pipes, cables and ducts should pass through existing gaps or spaces as far as possible and should avoid dressed ashlars or other significant features.

Dunollie Castle, Argyll: Built on an earlier fortification by MacDougall lords in the mid-fifteenth century, Dunollie retains many features that are important to understanding both its development and the cultural and architectural environments within Gaelic Scotland at the time it was built. It is a significant landscape feature, and regarded as the Clan MacDougall's ancestral seat. Despite a high level of preservation, consolidation was considered the most appropriate method of ensuring its future preservation. © Dunollie Preservation Trust.



7. CONSENTS

Monuments scheduled under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act (1979) require scheduled monument consent for any works. Where a structure is both scheduled and listed, the scheduling controls have precedence. Separate advice is available from [*Historic Environment Scotland's website*](#).

Listed building consent is required for any work to a listed building affecting its character (see the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997). The local planning authority determines the need for consent and will advise on applications.

Scheduled monument consent and listed building consent do not negate the need for planning permission or building warrants which might be required by the local planning authority.

8. SEARCHING FOR LISTED BUILDINGS AND OTHER DESIGNATIONS

You can search for listed buildings, scheduled monuments, battlefields, gardens and designed landscapes on [*Historic Environment Scotland's website*](#) (please read the guidelines on the search page). If you are still not sure whether a particular building is designated, you can also email or telephone us for help.

For a map-based search and wider environmental information, including conservation area boundaries, see the [*Scotland's Environment website*](#). You can also ask your local authority to tell you whether a building is listed and what is covered by the listing.

9. FURTHER INFORMATION AND ADVICE

Historic Environment Scotland is charged with ensuring that our historic environment provides a strong foundation in building a successful future for Scotland. One of our roles is to provide advice about managing change in the historic environment.

Grants

Various bodies award grants towards conservation projects but the competition is usually considerable. Historic Environment Scotland can award a grant under the 'Historic Environment Repair Grant' scheme which helps with the cost of repairs to buildings and monuments. Detailed information on making an application to these schemes should be sought from Historic Environment Scotland.

Legislation and policy

[*Buildings \(Scotland\) Act 2003*](#)

[*Planning \(Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas\) \(Scotland\) Act 1997*](#)

[*Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979*](#)

[*The Historic Environment Scotland Act 2014*](#)

[*Scottish Planning Policy \(2014\)*](#)

[*Historic Environment Scotland Policy Statement \(2016\)*](#)

Further reading

R Fawcett and A Rutherford, Renewed Life for Scottish Castles, CBA Research Report 165 (York, 2011).

For the full range of Inform Guides, Practitioners Guides, Technical Advice Notes and Research Reports please see the Publication section of the [*Historic Environment Scotland website*](#).

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