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EDINBURGH CASTLE VISITOR RECEPTION CENTRE: SUBMISSION FOR
SCHEDULED MONUMENT CLEARANCE

1 PURPOSE

Historic Scotland's Properties in Care Group are proposing to construct a new visitor reception facilities at Edinburgh Castle. Given the sensitivity of the site and the proposals, the Board's support for the assessment and recommendations made by the Inspectorate is sought.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Edinburgh Castle is the most famous and most visited historic site in the country. Continuous occupation for over a millennium has left a rich and varied group of buildings and archaeological remains on the castle rock. The castle is a Scheduled Ancient Monument in the care of Historic Scotland. It is protected under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979.
- 2.2 Works to scheduled monuments require the prior written consent of Scottish Ministers known as Scheduled Monument Consent. This is administered by Historic Scotland on the ministers' behalf. Works by government departments are regulated by a non-statutory parallel process of Scheduled Monument *Clearance* (SMC) which seeks to apply comparable scrutiny to proposals.
- 2.3 Historic Scotland's Properties in Care Major Projects team submitted draft proposals for Scheduled Monument Clearance in March 2006. A summary of the full information package subsequently supplied is given in Annex 1. The proposals are aimed at improving visitor management at Edinburgh Castle by introducing a new ticketing building on a newly introduced terrace above the coal yard at the northern end of the castle's eastern defences. (See illustration at Annex 2)
- 2.4 The eastern defences are a composite-date structure. They largely assumed their present form in 1886-8, when the current gatehouse was erected and the flanking walls raised, as part of a scheme designed by R Lawson Scott of the Royal Engineers and paid for by the War Office. The Edinburgh volume of the Buildings of Scotland series notes that the gatehouse is 'tepidly castellated', and that 'the intention had been to add to the picturesque design of the Castle, but the design was so pared on grounds of cost that it was not made public until after tenders had been accepted'.
- 2.5 The coal yard outer (east) wall follows the line of the 17th century dry ditch, and in its lower courses contains 17th or 18th century fabric. It was raised to its current height in 1886-8, creating a service yard used primarily for storing coal. The W wall of the space is formed by the Flanker, an artillery battery dating from the 16th century with a complex history of change, which currently houses the castle's main gift shop. The coal yard now forms the entrance to the 1990 castle service tunnel. As part of the associated works for the tunnel a new gateway from the Esplanade to the coal yard was constructed.
- 2.6 The coal yard is formed over part of the medieval defensive ditches which were backfilled in the middle of the 15th century. These ditches may be Iron Age in origin. The disturbance caused by the construction of the vehicle access tunnel in 1988-90

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resulted in the total excavation of the area and the removal of a late 17th-century cemetery. The sampling of the ditches at the time identified that they had been deliberately filled in a single phase but did not conclusively identify their depth or date of original formation. The ditch fills appear to be the only archaeological levels surviving within the coal yard.

- 2.7 At present ticketing for the Castle is achieved by a temporary ticket office occupying a wheeled, blue-painted cabin positioned on the Esplanade. The existing arrangements have numerous disbenefits. The 'temporary' ticket office detracts from the appearance of the Castle and Esplanade. It is not fully accessible to those with disabilities. Its position on the Esplanade creates health and safety dangers from vehicles to those in queues. This is a particular issue when the stands for the Tattoo are being constructed and dismantled. During the Tattoo it is necessary to remove the ticket office each evening.

3 THE PROPOSALS

- 3.1 The proposals can be broken down into a number of separate interventions which are integral to the overall project and require SMC. A concrete plat supported on steel columns will roof over the coal yard and create a new terrace over this space. The plat has been designed to minimise physical intervention on, and take no support from the surrounding historic masonry. The columns are supported on piles down to bedrock.
- 3.2 The outer gate of the coal yard will be reconstructed closer to its pre-1990 position.
- 3.3 The north wall of the coal yard will be raised to screen the new ticketing building from viewpoints in Princes Street Gardens and further afield. This wall will be raised in matching masonry reusing existing copes and will be detailed to permit the change to be discerned. The design will incorporate a louvered ventilation opening to supply fresh air to the gift shop within the Flanker and a glass panel to act as a balustrade in a space separating the new masonry from the Flanker.
- 3.4 The east wall of the coal yard will be raised to screen the new ticketing building from the Esplanade and act as a parapet to the terrace created by the concrete plat. As with the north wall, this wall will be raised in matching masonry reusing existing copes and will be detailed to permit the change to be discerned.
- 3.5 To the south the retaining wall separating the lower ward from the coal yard will be lowered and the levels of the lower ward adjusted to permit unimpeded circulation between the current entrance route and the new terrace. These works will also incorporate a change to the top of the stairs leading down into the coal yard.
- 3.6 A free-standing ticketing building will be constructed against the N wall of the terrace.

4 IMPACTS

Impact on buried archaeology

- 4.1 The archaeological impact will be confined to the use of piles which will support the concrete plat. While the pile caps extending 600mm below finished ground level are believed to be entirely within the levels of modern disturbance, the pile clusters

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themselves are likely to pass through ditch fill and may disturb deeply buried significant deposits.

Assessment: The proposed development has a small potential to have a negative impact on the archaeology of the monument.

Impact on standing fabric

- 4.2 The removal of the wall separating the coal yard from the lower ward will not affect historic fabric since this wall was completely replaced during the 1990 construction of the tunnel. The new plat is so detailed as to avoid any direct bearing on the existing fabric, so avoiding any impact. The perimeter walls will be raised following the removal of their Victorian copings, which will be rebbed at new finished wall height.

Assessment: The majority of existing standing fabric that will be affected by the proposals has little or no historical significance, having been rebuilt in 1990. Impact on other standing fabric will be minimal.

Visual impact of the development

- 4.3 By heightening the east wall, facing the Esplanade, the outer perimeter of the castle defences will be emphasised. In views from the Esplanade this will mask the gun ports in the Flanker and affect the visual layering of the castle's façades. It would appear that the raising of the screen wall may not entirely screen the ticketing building which could still appear as a low dark block.

Assessment: The proposals will have a slight, negative impact on the important views of the castle from the Esplanade.

- 4.4 The alteration of the modern gateway into the coal yard will create an entrance closer in appearance to the pre-1990 entrance.

Assessment: The proposals will improve the design of the gateway into the coal yard, making it more recessive and less of a visual distraction from the principal entrance.

- 4.5 The heightening of the north wall represents a minor visual change in views from the north of the castle, being heavily screened by trees and sitting easily within the existing assemblage of irregular changes in level and direction of the walls on this side of the complex. The glass panel adjacent to the Flanker wall is an incongruous element of detailing in this wall; a metal railing would be preferable.

Assessment: If amended to replace the glass panel with a metal railing, the proposals will have a negligible impact on views from the North.

- 4.6 The creation of the terrace over the coal yard will change the character of the entrance route into the castle complex by providing a large space off the main line of the approach. The position of the former wall will be clearly marked in the paving, so allowing the former enclosure to be discerned.

Assessment: The proposals will make changes to the monument which will further obscure the development of the castle complex as it has come down to us.

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- 4.7 The new ticketing building is a low, angular block clad in glass and black stainless steel. It reads clearly as a modern intervention and it could be easily removed from the castle complex. The building deliberately avoids conforming to the character of the surrounding structures but other than what may be visible from the Esplanade (see 4.3) the building does not lie within any key views from or within the castle complex.

Assessment: The proposals will introduce a boldly modern structure into the castle complex, which, while not in the key views within the complex, may be jarring stylistically.

- 4.8 The proposals have the benefit of permitting the permanent removal of the unsightly mobile ticketing booth on the Esplanade.

Assessment: The proposals will have a positive impact on the presentation of the castle from the Esplanade.

5 OTHER RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1 The assessment of impact (Section 4) identifies that the proposals will have a number of adverse impacts on the scheduled monument. Policies underpinning the principles of the 1979 Act require that developments which would have an adverse impact on a scheduled monument should not be permitted unless there are exceptional circumstances. It would be expected that such exceptional circumstances would be identified in the application and any supporting information. The Background Information within the Edinburgh Castle Visitor Reception Project Submission for SMC goes some way to outline the grounds for exceptional circumstances, in particular the exceptional pressure of visitor numbers, Health and Safety issues, requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act and the history of the search for other viable solutions.
- 5.2 There are a number of factors which contribute to these proposals being regarded as exceptional in terms of the consideration of SMC; the challenges presented by the volume of visitors to Edinburgh Castle and its very high international profile, the lack of any realistic alternatives, the significant disturbance which the proposed location for the new facilities and associated works has already encountered through the construction of the tunnel and the potential reversibility of the proposed changes.
- 5.3 The archaeological mitigation proposed for the areas of comparatively shallow disturbance will be acceptable subject to further detail regarding a nominated supervising archaeologist, reporting periods and provisions for unexpected discoveries. This would be secured by the imposition of a condition to the Clearance in normal terms for statutory SMC. As piling cannot be monitored through a standard archaeological watching brief, consideration must be given to the provision of a scheme for investigating the character of the deep ditch deposits through auguring (coring) before finalising the precise piling methodology. This should be secured through the imposition of a condition.
- 5.4 The proposals represent a significant alteration to the monument as it has come down to us. As such they could be seen as running counter to the principles underpinning the conservation of Scheduled Monuments. This is mitigated to a significant degree by the reversibility of the works and the measures taken to ensure that the changes

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can be discerned by close inspection of the structures. The exceptional circumstance of providing visitor facilities at Scotland's most visited ticketed attraction present a persuasive case for change.

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 The assessment of this application has shown that the proposals will have adverse archaeological, physical and visual impacts on the monument. The works have been designed to minimise this impact and it has not been possible to identify alternative solutions. The matter is very finely balanced between the need to ensure safe continued access to the monument and the preservation of the monument. There is also a history of successive interventions and the weight which can be attached to the need to continuing to secure safe public access to the monument. On balance the Inspectorate is satisfied the scheme is acceptable but recognises that this decision is likely to be subject to significant external interest.
- 6.2 It is recommended that Scheduled Monument Clearance should be offered for the proposed works subject to the minor amendment to the specification outlined at 4.5 and the conditions set out at 5.3.
- 6.3 The views of Historic Scotland Board are sought on the Inspectorate's recommendation.

Inspectorate,
June 2006

Annex 1

7 INFORMATION PROVIDED

7.1 The assessment of the Scheduled Monument Clearance is based upon the following information;

- Edinburgh Castle Project Development, Historic Scotland, 9th December, 1998 (It is understood that a more recent version of this document exists but was not immediately available).
- Edinburgh Castle Visitor Reception Study and Report Options Appraisal, Stevens & Associates, August, 2004
- Edinburgh Castle Visitor Reception Project Submission for SMC, Historic Scotland, 7th June, 2006
- Full set of architect's and engineer's drawings

