

Anta Estates

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Dear Sirs

## **CASTLE TIORAM**

1. As you know, we have been exploring in some detail the likely acceptability of possible new proposals for the adaptive reuse of Castle Tioram, following the refusal of scheduled monument consent for the previous application from Anta Estates in January 2002. I have taken personal charge of this assessment, and it has involved substantial new work.

2. The recent completion of Geoffrey Stell's *statement of cultural significance* for the castle, which we commissioned as part of our assessment, has allowed us to complete our considerations and Historic Scotland's Board discussed the assessment at its meeting on 21 August 2006. I thought I should write to you as soon as I was able with our considered views. I am also sending to you today by courier a full copy of our Board paper which includes the statement of cultural significance and other related material and the agreed minute of our Board discussion.

3. As no new application for scheduled monument consent has been submitted, this letter should be seen as forming part of the process of pre-application discussions which we commonly undertake with potential applicants. In these we provide *general guidance* on the likely acceptability of possible schemes and draw attention to key issues. It will be for the owners, having considered our advice, to decide how to take matters forward and I must stress that we would consider any application on its own merits.

4. We have focussed on the possibility of adaptive re-use for residential occupation with some public access, as we understand that this best reflects the ambitions of Anta Estates for the monument.

### **Legislation and policy**

5. The legislative and policy framework of relevance to this case was helpfully set out by the Reporter, Mr Duncan, in his report to Scottish Ministers dated 17 January 2002, which you already have. Of particular relevance is policy and guidance relating to scheduled ancient monuments. Since the 2002 report, Scottish Ministers have begun a process of producing a series of Scottish Historic Environment Policy documents (SHEPs). SHEP 2, *Scheduling*:

*protecting Scotland's nationally important monuments*, which sets out Ministers' policy on scheduling, has recently been published and is relevant to the assessment of the importance of Tioram (see paragraph 10 below).

6. It seems to us that in the policy framework it is an important general principle that as far as is possible scheduled ancient monuments be preserved in the state in which they have come down to us. Therefore any proposed works should be the minimum necessary consistent with the preservation of the monument. We most commonly grant consent on this basis for works relating to repair and conservation of monuments. We do however recognise that there can be *exceptional circumstances* where the 'minimum necessary' principle may not lead to the most desirable outcome for a monument and where a different approach might be considered acceptable. Examples of exceptional circumstances might include where the public understanding and enjoyment of a monument would be significantly enhanced; where intervention would provide crucial information for the long term management of the monument; and where a return to active use would be the most viable means of ensuring the monument's continued existence. We would need to consider each case on its own merits.

7. It seems to us to that it would be difficult to establish that an adaptive re-use scheme at Castle Tioram was the 'minimum necessary' for preserving the monument. It would be possible, for example, for the monument to be repaired and conserved without introducing a residential use. In looking at any proposals for adaptive reuse of the Castle, therefore, we have to consider whether there are exceptional circumstances, and whether the proposals would be to the long-term benefit of the monument.

### **Significance of Castle Tioram**

8. If we turn to the nature and significance of Castle Tioram, the monument is of national importance by virtue of its inclusion on the schedule of ancient monuments (protected under the provisions of the *Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979*). As discussed previously, we decided it was necessary for our considerations to commission a more detailed and independent *statement of cultural significance* for the Castle than currently existed so that all parties could better understand the nature of this importance. We therefore commissioned this study from Geoffrey Stell, formerly of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) and an acknowledged expert on Scottish castles and this has now been received. We are grateful for the assistance of Anta Estates in the preparation of this report.

9. This statement of cultural significance is intended to be 'conservation neutral' (ie. it does not make comments about future usage of the monument). It gives a detailed assessment of the importance of the castle itself. It also identifies a 'peer group' of Scottish west coast polygonal castles within which Tioram sits and the report makes some comparative observations. In his summary, Stell makes the following comments:

- Castle Tioram is the clearest representative we possess of a second generation of West Highland stone castles. Dating almost certainly from the middle decades of the 14<sup>th</sup> - century it derives its layout and design from earlier forms of enclosure castle and 'hall houses', combining these two elements in a manner previously unrecognised in Scotland.

- Unlike its counterparts such as Mingary, Castle Tioram was associated for over three centuries with a single family, Clanranald, and remained relatively untouched thereafter. For these reasons the developments and phases which can be read from the form and fabric of the building acquire more than ordinary significance as a now very rare reflection of the lifestyle of a Gaelic lord and his kindred.
- The wider context of a lordship with widely ramified interests and lands adds further special, and possibly unique, significance to Castle Tioram. The castle was the mainland outpost of a maritime empire which was always linked – and looked – to the Hebridean islands beyond the immediate horizons. The castle is conspicuously lacking in self-supporting and cultivable demesne or ‘table lands’, and unusually, possibly uniquely, such lands lay over 60 nautical miles away in the Uists, close to an equally distant family burial-place.
- The castle gains a very special, though intangible lustre, by its intimate associations with a family which manifested many significant aspects of Gaelic lordship and culture, especially in its 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>-century heyday. Unlike the castles of Dunvegan or Kisimul which have similar cultural associations but have been comprehensively remodelled or restored to occupancy, that period is still physically echoed in the surviving architecture of Castle Tioram.
- A combination of relatively understated architectural qualities gives Castle Tioram a more intriguing and challenging character than most of its western seaboard counterparts. Very much a castellologist’s castle, its fabric and site demand extraordinary levels of architectural detection and embody much scope for further investigation and analysis.

10. Stell’s report clearly suggests that Castle Tioram is of very high significance. Drawing on this report, we have undertaken an additional comparative analysis of the importance of Tioram in relation to both Stell’s defined peer group and a wider group or related castles using the criteria for determining national importance identified in SHEP 2. We believe that Stell’s report together with our further comparative analysis demonstrates that the monument is of particular significance within its peer group and is arguably the most significant of the western seaboard polygonal castles. In other words, when considering Scotland’s nationally important monuments, Castle Tioram must be regarded as of particular importance for understanding the nation’s history.

11. It seems to us that the high degree of importance of this monument creates a particularly strong presumption against unnecessary alteration of the building.

### **Potential impact of an adaptive re-use scheme**

12. It seems likely that any adaptive re-use scheme would necessitate significant works to the monument. Key works seem certain to include re-introduction of roofs, repair and consolidation of walls, introduction of windows and floors, repair or introduction of stairs and introduction of a range of services including lighting, heating, water and electricity. There is likely also to be a need for works outwith the castle itself relating to both services and access. We accept that methods can be found to reduce both the physical and visual impact of such works. Nonetheless it seems to us inevitable that these works would have a significant impact on both the existing built fabric of the monument and associated archaeological remains.

13. We would also note that in our experience there is a substantial risk in adaptive re-use projects of impacts which go beyond the original assessment at the outset of the project. This risk arises from the nature of historic structures, the unpredictability of archaeological remains, and the relative lack of flexibility when working with a sensitive historic monument to vary the detailed specification of works once on site. Additionally, were residential re-use to be introduced there might be subsequent desire for further change associated with such a use.

14. It seems to us that there is a clear need for a programme of consolidation and repair to the monument. This would entail some impact on both the built fabric and buried archaeological remains. The impacts associated with an adaptive re-use scheme however would in our view be significantly higher than those resulting from a repair and conservation scheme alone.

### **Other considerations**

15. We have not revisited in our assessment the issues of the economic impact of an adaptive reuse scheme, or the potential benefits it might bring for tourism in the local area. We are not aware of any new evidence which seems likely to change materially the findings of the Reporter on these matters following the inquiry into the previous application, and the tourism benefits would depend on the nature of any proposed new scheme including the arrangements for public access in any such proposals.

### **Summary**

16. In summary, our views on possible new applications for scheduled monument consent for the adaptive reuse of Castle Tioram as a residence with some public access are as follows:-

- Policy and guidance indicate that any interventions should be the minimum necessary consistent with the long-term preservation of the monument unless exceptional circumstances exist;
- Castle Tioram is of undoubted national importance. It is of great significance in relation to Scottish west coast polygonal castles and of particular importance therefore for wider Scottish history;
- Any scheme of adaptive re-use for residential usage with some visitor access is likely to have a significant impact on the monument and associated archaeological remains. These impacts seem certain to be greater than those associated with a conservation and repair scheme with an interpretative element;
- A scheme of consolidation and repair is entirely feasible without the necessity of an adaptive re-use to residential accommodation;
- There do not appear to be any other exceptional circumstances to justify departure from the general principle of minimum necessary intervention.

## Next Steps

17. The above represents our considered assessment, which has been unanimously endorsed by our Board. As I have said, we would, as we must, consider any new application relating to the castle on its merits. The assessment above should be helpful in demonstrating the criteria we would be likely to apply to any new proposals and we are happy to discuss these.

18. In the light of Geoffrey Stell's report, our own comparative work and the assessment above our view is that the best outcome for the castle in terms of its preservation and in terms of wider public benefit seems likely to include:

- the completion of a programme of repair and conservation work;
- the establishment of regular and reasonable public access; and
- the establishment of some form of interpretation facility near, but not in, the castle which would help visitors understand its significance and link its history with the other related castles and the wider Clanranald history.

19. We have previously offered to consider grant-aid for consolidation and repair of the monument, and for improving visitor interpretation, but Anta Estates has not wished to discuss this while the possibility of an adaptive reuse scheme was still under consideration. That offer still stands - indeed we are keen to discuss this given that the importance of the monument makes it a strong candidate for grant. We would also be interested in discussing the potential for a more ambitious interpretation scheme with Anta Estates, Highland Council, the local community and other interested parties.

20. Because of the continuing public interest in Castle Tioram, we shall place tomorrow on the Historic Scotland website a copy of Geoffrey Stell's report, our Board paper, the minute of the Board discussion, and this letter.

Yours sincerely

**Malcolm Cooper**  
Chief Inspector