

Inventory of Historic Battlefields - Revisions to Selection Guidance
Historic Environment Scotland
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Online Response to Inventory of Historic Battlefields - Revisions to Selection Guidance

Many thanks for giving the Society an opportunity to respond to this consultation. Details about the Society are available on our website (www.socantscot.org). The Society responds to the eight questions as follows:

Overview

This section describes the legal basis for the inventory of historic battlefields, the role of Historic Environment Scotland, and the purpose of the designation.

The purpose is not defined in law, but was set out in the Scottish Historic Environment Policy and appeared most recently in the Historic Environment Scotland Policy Statement (2016).

We think that it is desirable to re-state our understanding of the purpose of the inventory of historic battlefields.

8. How do you view the stated purpose of the inventory of historic battlefields?

Highly agree

Slightly agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Slightly disagree

Highly disagree

Do you have any further comments on this section:

Rather than calling this an 'Overview' it might be clearer to refer to it as the 'Purpose of the Inventory'. An overview suggests something more all-encompassing, and this short three paragraph introduction is, as stated in the question, more about the purpose.

What is a Battle?

In this section of the selection guidance, our intention is to explain how we define certain things, for the purpose of selecting battlefields for the inventory.

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The term 'battlefield' is defined in law (in section 32B of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979). We do not intend to pursue changes to this legal definition.

Scotland's history includes a wide range of different types of conflict. Therefore, we think it is necessary to first of all define a battle for the purposes of selecting sites for the inventory.

We would welcome your views on how we define 'battle' for the purpose of selecting sites for the inventory.

9. To what extent do you agree with the following definition of 'battle' for the purpose of selecting sites for the inventory? 'A battle is defined as involving at least two opposing groups of primarily military/martial forces, actively engaged in direct combat with the other, and with the primary intent of inflicting lethal damage upon the opposing force.' We understand that there are other types of conflict site which would not meet this definition, such as the sites of sieges, or civil conflict.

Highly agree

Slightly agree

Neither agree or disagree

Slightly disagree

Highly disagree

Please provide any comments below:

No comment.

How we decide if a battlefield is of national importance

Based on evidence gathered through our review of how battlefields are working in the planning system, we are not proposing to make major changes to this section of the selection guidance.

We have however taken the opportunity to update certain aspects:

1. how we consider cultural associations of battlefields, including their intangible cultural heritage; and
2. to distinguish more clearly between physical features of a battlefield that are human-made, and natural landscape features that influence a battle.

10. To what extent do you agree with how we decide if a battlefield is of national importance for the purposes of the inventory?

Strongly agree

Slightly agree

Neutral – no opinion or undecided

Slightly disagree

Strongly disagree

Do you have any comments:

Historical and cultural association

What are ‘linked’? regional histories? Are they linked to the national history, or interlinked regional histories? We propose dropping “linked”.

In this bullet point: “The place of the battle within wider culture, including literature, music, art, sculpture, and film, oral tradition, folklore and tradition, and living connections with groups and communities.” We’d remove the “and” in front of film and suggest that the term “intangible cultural heritage” is used in the annex text since the UK ratified the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in March 2024.

Significant physical remains and/or archaeological potential

Remove the colon at the end of the header (or add one to the “Historical and cultural association” header).

We strongly object to the use of “archaeological remains” in the text (see our answer to Q15) – archaeology is a process and remains can contribute to archaeological potential through the techniques it uses to understand our past, but there are no rarified “archaeological remains”.

Ditto “archaeological evidence” (except when referring to the outputs of the archaeological process, which this isn’t) and “archaeological and physical remains”. The latter exemplifies the confusion that can arise and suggests there is some non-physical remains that are “archaeological”.

What is really being sought here is recognition of the potential for physical remains to be useful in undertaking archaeological research which can add further knowledge.

Battlefield landscape:

Ditto our comment regards the colon at the end of the header.

We propose rephrasing “This refers to understanding the landscape characteristics of the battlefield, not just in the main area of fighting but also in the wider landscape where significant events occurred.” for clarity to something like “This refers to understanding the wider landscape where significant events occurred, not just the main area of fighting.”

Replace “As...” with “Because...”

Remove the comma before “or valleys”.

The text in the first bullet-point section needs a bit of revision to clarify, either including another hyphen and/or semi-colon etc.

It may be a typo, but what is a “battle memorial” in the final bullet point section?

Presumably this should just read “at the time of the battle”?

The same bullet point section states: “these are often located to relate to elements of the battlefield landscape” which suggests they were built to relate to the battlefield.

This could just say “these often relate to elements of the battlefield landscape”.

What we include in a designation

This is a new section of the guidance and is intended to clarify what aspects will include in an inventory battlefield designation.

In particular, the changes explain:

1. how we interpret the term 'significant activities' related to a battle; and
2. how we decide what contributes to national importance.

11. How do you view the elements we include in a battlefield designation?

Highly agree

Slightly agree

Neither agree or disagree

Slightly disagree

Highly disagree

Give your comments here:

Again, as per our answer to Q10 above, in the third bullet point in paragraph 18 there are no such things as “archaeological features”, but there can be “archaeological potential” (because this would relate to the activity of archaeological research).

The final paragraph 20 states: “All landscapes in which battles were fought have changed since the battle due to natural processes and human intervention. Some may now lie within heavily developed urban areas, or in areas where there has been significant development or changes in land use. We will only include areas of land where these contribute to the national importance of the battlefield.”

What is difference between heavily developed urban areas and significant development? Isn't the former just an example of the latter?

How we draw the boundary of an inventory battlefield

This is a new section of the selection guidance, and is intended to clarify the principles behind setting boundaries for inventory battlefields.

12. To what extent do you agree with 'how we draw the boundary of an inventory battlefield'?

Strongly agree

Slightly agree

Neutral – no opinion or undecided

Slightly disagree

Strongly disagree

Do you have any comments?

Paragraph 21 states: “In order for the inventory to serve its primary function as a tool for planning and land management” – this may well be the view of HES but many Society Fellows and members of the public see it as primarily a means for protecting battlefields (in any situation), and the Society believes this could unintentionally prescribe the role of the inventory. The paragraph could be reworded as “In order for the inventory to serve as a tool for planning and land management.”

Or could be more explicit and say, “In order for the inventory to serve its primary function as a means for protecting battlefields, it needs to work within planning and land management regimes.”

With regard to paragraph 21b: Given the use of modern mapping technology why is there still a need to link even modern surveying (such as through high precision GPS) to “mapped and identifiable points in the modern landscape” which can change over time?

Inventory records

We are committed to reviewing individual records so that they focus primarily on informing understanding of the battlefield and its management through the planning system, and less on the events of the battle.

We are proposing changes to the format and content of inventory battlefield records, bearing in mind that these may begin to vary as we review individual records.

We envisage that some of the detailed history of the event of the battle, and research which informed the preparation of the inventory entry, including aspects such as deployment maps, will become accessible through the National Record for the Historic Environment, rather than through the inventory record itself.

This information will remain accessible through a single HES website - 'trove.scot'. This new website, due to launch to the public in 2024, will bring together the information, images, and data that is currently spread across multiple HES websites.

13. How do you view the revised format and content of inventory battlefield records we are proposing?

Strongly agree

Slightly agree

Neutral – no opinion or undecided

Slightly disagree

Strongly disagree

Do you have any comments?

No comment.

14. How do you view our proposal to move supplementary research information into the National Record for the Historic Environment so that it can be read alongside, rather than as part of the inventory record?

Highly agree

Slightly agree

Neither agree or disagree

Slightly disagree

Highly disagree

Please provide any comments here:

This will require clear links between each of the information repositories which will not break over time.

Anything else?

15. Do you have any other comments on the revisions to selection guidance?

Archaeology is defined as a process and one in which everyone can partake – see Scotland's Archaeology Strategy for example – and the continued

compartmentalisation of an “archaeological site” or “archaeological remains” from other parts of Scotland’s heritage, is unhelpful and leads to confusion. A perfect example lies in this annex draft where mention is made of “archaeological and physical remains”! The term should only be used when referring to a process or the results of the process.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Gilmour', written in a cursive style.

Dr Simon Gilmour
Director (director@socantscot.org)