Contents

1. Executive Summary

Background

This is an identical planning application to that refused by the council in 2005 (S/2004/0001). It has been submitted by English Heritage at the invitation of the council. This invitation was made after a committee site visit was made to the area behind the Steel Houses, (not available to members at the time of the previous application), that included a detailed alignment on the ground of the proposed land train and further detailed analysis of the refusal reasons as part of the appeal process, (specifically production of our broad grounds of defence, known as a Rule 6 Statement), upon which members agreed that there were grounds for reconsideration.

The purpose of this report is to analyse those grounds in detail to allow members to decide whether the refusal reasons are still valid or whether they can be overcome through planning controls and mitigation. However it must be emphasised that as this is a new application all planning issues must be viewed afresh and considered on their own merits.

The Proposal

Planning permission is sought for the following:

- Construction of a new visitor centre on land to the east of Countess Road.
- Construction of a transit system to move guests between the Visitor Centre and World Heritage Site
- Decommissioning and removal of the existing visitor facilities and car park, adaptation to underground service facility
- Decommissioning of the A344 between its junction with the A360 (Airman's Corner and remodelling of the roadbed.
- Under grounding of 33kv power lines which cross the site.

Views of Consultees:

Statutory consultees have no objections, providing conditions are used to ensure mitigation measures proposed are implemented and maintained.

As a result of the publicity the following organisations objected to the proposal and recommend refusal: Association of Wessex Tourist Guides, Countess Road Residents Group, CPRE Wiltshire Branch, Amesbury Town Council, Wilsford Cum Lake Parish Council, Bulford Parish Council, Durnford Parish Council, Durrington Parish Council, Salisbury Transport 2000, Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, Association of Council Taxpayers, a local farmer, Trail Riders Fellowship, UK Rivers Network, The Stonehenge Alliance, ICOMOS UK

Views of the Community

There has been a low key response to this application, however this is because as the application is identical to that previously considered in 2005, that in all communications the council made it clear that all previous comments would be brought forward to this case and that there was no need for the same issues to be raised again.

When the representations made in response to this current application and the previous one S/2004/0001 are taken into account collectively, then there has been an overwhelming response against the proposal from the local community

Total number of Representations received	928
Objections	814
Support	64
Observations	50

Comprehensive summaries of the grounds of objection raised are included in Appendix 3 on page 114 to this report

Summary of Local Policy

Planning policies of the Development Plan supports the application. . Furthermore when the details of the scheme are scrutinised in conjunction with the detailed policy framework it is considered that the planning application is in accordance with the provisions of the Development Plan.

The application is also in accordance with the criteria of the council's Supplementary Planning Guidance contained in the adopted World Heritage Site management Plan, Planning Brief for the Countess East site, County Waste Management, and Creating Places (District Wide Design Guide).

Summary of Regional, National and International Policy

Overall the Government guidance is promoting a consistent theme, which is to seek to promote sustainable patterns of development. The planning application is considered, in principle, to comply with national and regional planning guidance. Its design and siting are based on the principle of sustainable development, while there is in landscape terms a significant net benefit of removing the inappropriate 20th century clutter from the World Heritage Site. It will undoubtedly bring both direct and indirect benefits to Amesbury and the district.

Planning Considerations:

The main planning analysis has centred on the following key issues:

- A detailed analysis of the two previous refusal reasons, comprising re-evaluation of the impact of the proposed transit system and the validity of using Grampian style conditions to tie the visitor centre to the delivery of the A303 improvements. (Note: a Grampian style condition is related to works outside of the red line of the application site which are considered a pre-requisite to the development taking place).

- There is an overwhelming view held internationally, nationally, and locally that some action must be taken at Stonehenge, which improves the World Heritage Site whilst maintaining a high quality of public access, including for the mobility impaired. Taking this as a starting point there is a need to balance the strategic need to do something at Stonehenge against local impacts.

- Assessment of Key Planning Issues including: design of the proposals, impact on neighbours, the site selection process, selection process of land train route, landscape Impact Analysis, access strategy, sustainability, tourism, socio-economic considerations

- Evaluation of the Environmental Impact Assessment comprising: archaeology & Historic Environment, landscape character and visual amenity, nature conservation and biodiversity, noise and Vibration, geology and soils, water quality, drainage and hydrology, air quality and emissions, agriculture, socio-economic effects, recreation, cumulative impacts

- Evaluation of the Transportation Assessment comprising: transport policy, relationship with the A303 and closure of the A344, existing and projected transport conditions, sustainability and travel plans, parking provision.

- Appropriate Assessment of Impacts on the River Avon under the Habitat Regulations, including: background and legal framework, the key steps, consultation with English nature, consultation, the sites conservation objectives, request for further information, identifying the effects, the conclusion.

- Relationship with the published A303 Improvements comprising: overview, timing, safeguarding, conclusions and response to the comments of neighbours and third parties

Findings of Further Analysis on Previous Refusal Reasons

Taking them in turn, there has been exhaustive further analysis of the land train route and its potential impacts. The starting point to acknowledge is that members have already accepted the principle of development on the Countess East site by the adoption of a Planning Brief as Supplementary Planning Guidance. Once this was accepted it was always implicit that there would be the need for a transit system to take visitors to and from Stonehenge. Indeed the adopted brief makes this explicit.

Given this acceptance in principle, detailed analysis has centered on the likely impacts as highlighted in the Environmental Statement, detailed site analysis and consideration of alternatives. The findings of this assessment is that the proposed land train route is the best option available and will not have an unacceptably adverse impact upon the neighbours, archaeology or the setting of the World Heritage Site.

The issue of the ensuring that the requisite A303 improvements are delivered to support the scheme has been re-assessed and the legal position with regard the use of Grampian style conditions revisited.

Further analysis and legal consideration has further confirmed that a Grampian style condition can be quite legitimately used to tie the delivery the of the visitor centre to the key elements of the A303 scheme even with the current review being undertaken. No demonstrable harm can be seen to derive from such an approach, and indeed on reflection it does offer the council a valuable mechanism of reviewing the potential change in environmental impacts should a different road scheme to the published scheme be decided by the Secretary of State.

Summary And Conclusions

In this case, starting from the Development Plan policy framework, through to issues such as impact on the highways network, landscape, archaeology and wildlife issues, there emerges support for approving this application. While the local community and a number of consultees have made fair and robust objections, as is their prerogative, on analysis it becomes clear that their arguments cannot be substantiated as planning grounds for refusal.

A very detailed re-assessment of the reasons used for refusing the previous application, in the context of the recent members site visit has found that the two previous objections could be addressed by imposing planning controls and by other means of mitigation. Once the council accepted the principle of a new visitor centre at Countess Road, some form of transit system was implicit. On environmental grounds the one chosen has minimal impacts and no better alternative exists. Furthermore a Grampian style condition can be quite legitimately used to tie the visitor centre to the delivery of the published A303 improvement scheme

Members are advised that this planning application is well conceived, in accordance with policy and benefits from some excellent architectural design in the form of the new visitor centre building. Furthermore, while there are areas where adverse impacts will be produced, most notably upon the Cursus, and the loss of high grade agricultural land, it is undoubtedly the case that these impacts are more than compensated for through the net benefits that the application will bring, not least of which is helping to return Stonehenge to a more respectful setting more befitting of its international reputation.

Recommendation - ***Approve*** subject to:

- the conditions and Section 106 agreement as set out in the report;
- and referral to the Secretary of State for consideration

and that members ***endorse*** the findings of the Appropriate Assessment

2. Introduction and Objective of Report

This report seeks to determine the full planning application (S/06/0700) for the proposal outlined below, submitted by English Heritage, under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

The application was submitted to Salisbury District Council on the 3rd April 2006 and formally registered on the same day. It is classified as a major application and as such any decision taken by the council will be subject to referral to the Government Office South West, for consideration of holding a public inquiry.

It is the objective of this report to set out the facts and the outcome of planning scrutiny of the proposal in order to allow the members of committee to reach an informed decision upon the planning merits of the application. In order to allow this the report will comprise the following components:

- A detailed analysis of the refusal reasons of the identical application submitted in 2004
- Detailed description of the proposals
- A description of the site and its surroundings
- An appraisal of the existing visitor centre facilities
- A summary of relevant site history
- A description of the consultation processes and feedback received
- An analysis of planning issues starting with adopted local plan policy and taking account of all other material considerations
- An evaluation of the Environmental Impact Assessment
- An evaluation of the Transportation Assessment
- An Appropriate Assessment of impacts on the River Avon under the Habitat Regulations
- Response to the comments of neighbours and third parties
- Summing up, conclusions and recommendation.

A fundamental role for this council to perform in determining this identical application is to assess whether there are material grounds to reconsider the refusal reasons. In order to help members make this decision, officers have carried out a detailed re-assessment of the two refusal reasons. This is the most obvious place to start our deliberations. However, this is a fresh planning application and it is necessary to determine it upon its merits, and hence after the initial revisiting of the original grounds for refusal it is necessary to analyse all of the merits of the application in depth, in particular in relation to developments in the external environment, to assess it within the most contemporary context.

3. Detailed Analysis of Previous Reasons for Refusal

On the 6th July 2005 this Panel refused planning permission on two grounds that can be summarised as:

- The impact of the proposed land train, in terms both of its specifications and route
- That the government's review of the options, announced shortly before this Panel's decision, meant that there was such uncertainty over the road proposals that planning permission should not be granted.

Re-Evaluation Of Refusal Reason One

To recap, the first reason on which the planning application was refused is as follows:

> *The proposal as submitted relies upon the provision of a passenger transit system known as the 'land train', within the World Heritage Site. The applicants have failed to demonstrate that the transit system, in terms of its length, width, height, frequency, route and specification does not have an adverse impact upon:*
>
> 1. *The archaeology of the World Heritage Site (including the Cursus),*
> 2. *The visual setting of the World Heritage Site and*
> 3. *The amenities of local residents.*
>
> *The proposal is therefore considered to be contrary to policies, DP1, HE1, HE2 of the Wiltshire County Structure Plan 2001 and G1, G2, CN20, CN22, CN24, C1, C2 of the adopted Salisbury District Local Plan 2003.*

On the first reason regarding the land train legal advice indicates that this is the type of issue where members are perfectly entitled to reach a different judgment from officers. However, there is an overwhelming view that some action must be taken at Stonehenge, which improves the WHS whilst maintaining a high quality of public access, including for the mobility impaired. In the absence of any other solution, and given the acceptance of the principle of a Visitor Centre at Countess via adoption of Supplementary Planning Guidance, one must take the view that one of the routes must be acceptable. Whilst the northern route is seen to be objectionable by the members in terms of loss of amenity to residents, the LPA need to assess whether any impacts are unacceptable given the mitigation measures, which EH are proposing. Members have witnessed many of the features outlined below during the detailed site visit to the field behind Fargo Road.

Officers Re-Assessment Of The Impact On Neighbouring Residents

A detailed review of the northern portion of the land train route has led officers to the same conclusions as contained in the original committee report to P&R on 26th July 2005. While there may be some detriment to the amenity of residents in the Steel houses in Fargo Road, in the context of the whole scheme and the significance of Stonehenge as a World Heritage Site, this is considered to be marginal and can be successfully mitigated through design, landscaping and the imposition of perfectly valid conditions placing a cap on noise levels permissible. When evaluated against the overall benefits of the scheme of returning Stonehenge to a more respectful setting and improving the visitor experience to the monument, then there would appear to be no reason why this proposal should not be approved. To take a detailed view of the reasons for this conclusion the main issues are laid out below.

Distance of Land Train from Steel Houses

At the closest point the land train will be some 35 metres away from the rear fences of the properties in Fargo Road. These properties also have rear gardens ranging from 20 to 28 metres in length. At its closest point the land train will be over 60 metres away from the back of the houses in Fargo Road. To place this in context the length of the Bourne Hill forecourt from entrance to road is some 32 metres. Therefore the land train will run a significant distance away from the Steel Houses and this will very substantially mitigate any potential impacts.

Existence of Rear Access Road

Members should be aware that an access road of some 5 metres in width runs to the rear of the Steel houses, between their back garden fences and the field boundary to the south. An access route is already established and in use. This would act as a buffer between the properties and the planned route of the

land train. It is not the case that the back gardens will simply abut the field and will look straight out over the transit route.

Back of Steel houses

The rear of the Steel houses are of varying quality. In many cases any views out over the field to the south are partially or fully blocked off by a mixture of outbuildings, sheds, vehicles, or stored materials. It is not the case that all of the residents currently enjoy uninterrupted views over the meadow. Indeed there is a certain level of enclosure, which makes it difficult to argue that the amenity of many of the residents will materially change to any great extent. It makes it equally difficult to argue that the new land train would add an oppressive feature, which will make residents feel hemmed in.

Right to view

We must be unequivocal here; in planning, no one has a 'right' to a view and therefore this cannot be substantiated as grounds for refusal.

Height of land train track

Further to the previous consideration of this proposal the height of the land train track has been measured in detail. It ranges in height due to the varying level of the ground on which it is to be overlain. However these variations are all within the range shown in the following table.

Drawing Number	Width	Height
NR02.2	6m	0.2 m (7.87 inches)
NR03.2	6m	0.3 m (11.8 in)
NR03.3	6m	0.4m (15.75 in)
NR04.4	5 m	0.3 m (11.8 in)
NR05.2	5 m	0.3 m (11.8 in)

Dimensions of land train track as shown in application document entitled "Design Statement and Planning Application Drawings", dated August 2004 and submitted with the planning application S/2006/0700, Engineering Drawings by Anthony Hunt Associates in Appendix B.

To provide members with some context, at its highest point the land train track will be approximately the height of an A3 piece of paper.

Effectiveness of Landscaping

The application proposes a substantial landscape buffer between the route of the land train and the rear of the steel houses. This buffer is proposed to be some 20 metres in width, which is substantial. It is approximately the same width as the existing Cursus plantation to the south

Those residents in the Steel houses who have retained a view do not enjoy open vistas into the far distance. The Cursus plantation closes in their aspect some 90 metres away. Therefore although the effect of the proposal would be to bring this landscaping screen some 70 metres closer, it would not cut off or screen any existing distant views. The landscaping belt would still be 15 metres away from the back fences and 40 metres away from the backs of the dwellings themselves and thus there will be no significant impact on daylight or sunlight on the houses

In order to allow the mitigation of the landscaping to be most effective at the earliest stage the applicants have agreed to advance planting, prior to the commencement of the Scheme construction works, of all planting associated with the Land Train route other than that for the Countess Road underpass. This advance planting would be carried out at the earliest opportunity following decision by EH to tender for the Scheme works. This could include letting an advance planting contract to implement all the planting shown in relation to the Land Train route in the planning application, with the exception of that in the vicinity of the Countess Road underpass. Planting in this area could be undertaken when all earthworks are completed. Such advance planting would give a significant amount of time for the landscaping to establish and become effective prior to implementation of the land train.

With regard to the specific details of the landscaping it would be appropriate to use species found within the adjacent shelterbelts in order for the new planting to integrate into the landscape. However, the percentage of the species used may vary from the existing in order to:

- ensure rapid establishment through the use of fast growing species including a 'nurse species' which would be ultimately removed from the woodland once longer term species establish,
- evergreens to ensure all year round screening,
- shrub edges to ensure screening to ground level, rather than clear trunks,
- use of predominantly native/locally indigenous species to achieve best establishment, landscape integration and nature conservation benefits

The applicants have agreed to this and again a requisite condition to control the species mix and a future management plan would be suggested should members be minded to approve this planning application.

It is considered that, via the use of appropriate landscape conditions, an effective landscape screen can be provided which will effectively mitigate the visual impact of the land train upon the neighbours, while having very little impact on the quality of the outlook currently enjoyed by some residents.

Noise

The applicants have carried out noise analysis within their Environmental Statement, which indicates that noise levels will be kept within acceptable limits. Furthermore, your officers have considered this issue so important that consultants (Casella Stanger) have been engaged who have carried out rigorous independent tests and scrutiny of the likely noise disturbance the proposals may cause. This has been seen as crucial in order to robustly test the information within the Environmental Statement.

This independent work has verified the findings of the Environmental Statement. Providing conditions are applied to limit the maximum noise of the land train and visitor centre operation together with a limit on the hours of operation, then no material detriment will accrue to the residents of nearby properties. It is entirely reasonable and legal to place conditions on any planning permission to control noise, which was suggested by officers in this case. The issues have not changed and noise, with the controls suggested, still does not constitute a sustainable reason on which to refuse this application.

Potential Revisions to Land Train Route

On further, detailed analysis your officers reaffirm that based on sound and sustainable planning grounds the scheme is acceptable. Be that as it may, officers explored the possibility of negotiating a revision in the route of the land train where it passes the Steel houses, to move it further away from the properties. Such negotiations could not produce an amendment, as it was clear that the constraints of the Scheduled Ancient Monuments physically prevent relocation any further to the south. To insist would have lead to objections to the application from the statutory consultees on Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

Officers therefore conclude that the route of the land train is acceptable as submitted.

Impact of Land Train on Residents of Countess Road

Further potential impact, which concerned a number of members, was that of the land trains waiting to enter to tunnel under Countess Road and the noise disturbance that may be caused by the idling and then revving engines. The actual waiting point of the land trains prior to entering the single lane tunnel is 30 metres away from the nearest back garden fence and some 63 metres away from the nearest property. The waiting zone is some 25 metres before the route enters the tunnel. Furthermore when they are closest to the neighbouring property as they enter the tunnel portal the vehicles will be in a cutting some 6 metres below ground level.

Together with the maximum decibels level suggested by the Local Planning Authority's noise consultant, the potential disturbance of the land train as it enters and leaves the tunnel does not represent a sustainable reason for refusal. The mitigatory measures suggested in the application are sound.

Technical Specifications of the Land Train

To help clarify the amount of impact the land train will have, your officers have collated the known details together for analysis. However members should bear in mind that the actual land train does not yet exist and will only be commissioned should this project go ahead. Therefore the details listed below should be considered technical parameters or a benchmark for the future vehicle.

- Each land train will consist of four carriages, one of which will house the power unit.
- To minimise visual impact the land trains will be the minimum practical height and width; "double-decker" designs will not be considered.
- Each land train will carry a maximum of 150 passengers, all seated, with space for at least two wheelchair users.
- All carriages will be fully enclosed.
- The land trains will run on rubber tyres to minimise noise.
- It is currently envisaged that the land trains will be powered by Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) for low emission levels and quiet running. This could be upgraded to Compressed Natural Gas or electric fuel cells if technology allows.
- The land trains will be finished in an appropriate non-reflective matt colour, with windows of low-reflection glass, in order to minimise visual impact in the landscape.
- Land trains may need to be fitted with headlights for safety reasons, but it is not intended that these would be used in normal circumstances.
- The land trains will run on a porous bound gravel surface laid on top of the existing ground to avoid any damage to archaeology; this will be entirely reversible should there be a need to remove it at any point in the future.
- The height of the land train route will vary according to the natural topography, up to a maximum height of 0.5m above the existing ground surface.
- Doors will only be opened at designated drop-off and pick-up points.
- Boarding would be from the nearside only, using low-level platforms to provide level access.
- At peak times a land train would leave the visitor centre every ten minutes.
- The land trains would be operated at a maximum speed of 15kph to minimise noise and maintain the tranquillity of the landscape.
- It is not intended that there would be an amplified commentary audible outside of the land trains.
- Land trains would be stored, refuelled and cleaned to the rear of the new visitor centre; this area will be in a cutting and will therefore not be visible from adjoining properties.

Should members be minded to approve this application then it is considered essential that a condition be applied requiring the submission of the detailed design of the land train for approval by the council prior to implementation. This would allow the council to retain control.

The specifications of the land train coupled with the noise analysis and landscaping proposed, will successfully mitigate the potential impacts upon neighbouring residents. Specifically with regard to the land train, measures such as them being enclosed, no commentary audible externally, rubber tyres, matt colours and controlled access all are considered well conceived to ensure minimum intrusion.

Conclusions

On re-assessment of the application and detailed site analysis, officers still consider that the northern route of the land train has an impact on the residents of the Steel houses, but this can be minimised by condition and careful landscaping. Furthermore when that impact is balanced against the overall improvements to a monument of international importance, then this is not considered to represent a sustainable reason for refusal.

Officers Re-Assessment Of The Impact On Archaeology

The second part of the first refusal reason was based on the potential harm to archaeology that the land train may cause. Again officers have revisited this to assess whether the refusal reason is robust. A number of salient points have emerged.

Experts agree

The key specialists with statutory responsibility for archaeology have not objected to the northern route of the land train.

Impact on Scheduled Ancient Monuments

Once the location of the new visitor centre at Countess Road was accepted, and the site is the subject of adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance, then the principle of a transit system for visitors is implicit in any scheme. Given that there has to be a transit system, the route of the land train has been carefully chosen to minimise impact on archaeology. It does not impinge on the site of any Scheduled Ancient Monument. While the Environmental Statement and views of consultees do highlight that the land train would impact adversely on the setting of the Cursus, it would have no direct impact on the archaeology due to the track design to lay over the surface with no ground disturbance in a fully reversible manner. When considered in conjunction with the substantial benefits of securing dispersed access and removal of inappropriate development from the setting of Stonehenge, then it is considered that the reversibility with no direct impact is a very strong argument.

Conclusions on Archaeology

While there would be some adverse impacts on archaeology, they will be reversible and leave no permanent damage. When the access proposals are taken as a whole they will bring substantial benefits to the World Heritage Site. Again members are strongly advised that this issue does not represent a sustainable reason for refusal.

Officers' Re-Assessment Of The Impact On The World Heritage Site Landscape

Impact of the Proposed Route

The northern route does have benefits of allowing relatively easy access for all but the most severely disabled to approach the Stones. It is outside of the core area, discreet in the landscape and will not be viewed from the monument and its core area. The routes of the land train have been well chosen to minimise their impact on the landscape. They largely follow the routes of existing byways and use existing tree belts and ridgelines to conceal them from site when viewed from Stonehenge monument and its core area.

The idea of having a range of access options encouraged by two land train routes is a good one and supports a key objective of the World Heritage Site Management Plan. Visitors will be encouraged to explore much more of the World Heritage Site than just Stonehenge itself.

Is There A More Discrete Route?

Once the location of the new visitor centre at Countess Road was accepted, and the site is the subject of adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance, then the principle of a transit system for visitors is implicit in any scheme. Given that there has to be a transit system, the route of the land train has been carefully chosen to minimise impact on the landscape.

Re-Assessment Of Alternative Routes

Given that the additional detailed analysis regarding impact on neighbours, archaeology and landscape have concluded that the refusal reasons for the northern route of the land train are very difficult to sustain, then the final argument that may help the substantiate the refusal reason is that, although the route is acceptable, does an alternative exist that is even better and therefore should be utilised. A further appraisal of alternatives has been carried out to assess whether this is the case.

The applicants proposed a dispersed access route, which is supported in the World Heritage Site Management Plan. Their justification for this choice is based on the following:

- Land train route would be located outside of the central area of the WHS
- The multiple drop- off points (including the Cursus and Woodhenge/Durrington Walls interim stops) would encourage a dispersed pattern of visitor access to avoid excessive point loading that could erode thin chalk grassland
- Provides a variety of access to a wider area of the WHS
- Provides equality of access experience for all visitors including independent access for the disabled
- Allows a flexible system that can respond to fluctuations in demand
- Strikes a balance between providing easy access and conservation of the environment
- The adverse impacts on the Cursus are, due to construction methods, reversible.

The only viable alternative options would be either a lone central route (drop off at Kings Barrow Ridge), a lone southern route (dropping off at Stonehenge Cottages) or a combination of the two.

There are drawbacks of relying on any single route alone as this will cause heightened environmental damage to the chalk grassland via soil erosion due to a single point of loading. Furthermore a single drop off point would not meet the dispersed access objectives of the Management Plan (which is adopted SPG). Furthermore the nearest practicable alternative drop off would be at Stonehenge Cottages which represents a difficult route for the mobility impaired being uneven terrain and a further distance to the Stones.

Overall Conclusions on Re-assessment of Refusal Reason One

Officers have carried out the further detailed assessment of refusal reason one and this has further confirmed the original recommendation as contained in the original committee report. There exist no sustainable reasons for refusing this planning application on the basis of the impact of the land train. Exhaustive analysis and specialist advice confirms that any adverse impact on neighbours is minimal and that archaeological impacts are more than compensated for by the overall benefits that the scheme will bring to this site of international importance. Furthermore once the principle of some form of transit system has been accepted, as it has in this case, then there are no alternative routes which are as good as the one proposed.

4. Re-evaluation of Refusal Reason two

To recap the second reason for refusal was as follows:

> "*The proposal as submitted to develop the new visitor centre for the World Heritage Site of Stonehenge, relies fundamentally upon the provision of a flyover at Countess Roundabout, as part of the A303 Trunk Road (Stonehenge Improvement) Orders.*
>
> *The requirement to provide a safe access to the site and maintain the free flow of traffic upon the A303 at Countess Roundabout is critical to the authorisation of this proposal. It is not considered that the applicant has demonstrated that this can be delivered within a reasonable time scale, which enables the conditioning of the flyover to the proposed development, in accordance with government advice contained within Department of the Environment Circular 11/95.*
>
> *The recent decision of Government that a detailed review of the options to ease congestion on the A303 is to be carried out has exacerbated the level of uncertainty regarding the flyover. Therefore in the absence of any clear and reasonable expectation of the flyover taking place, it is considered that the proposal for the Visitor Centre should not be approved.*
>
> *The proposal as submitted is therefore considered contrary to policy DP2 of the Wiltshire County Structure Plan 2001 and policies G2 and TR12 of the adopted Salisbury District Local Plan, 2003 and the Countess East Planning Brief adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance in December1999.*"

On the second reason regarding the A 303, it is fully accepted that the Panel's concern that the development should not proceed without certainty about the road proposals going ahead. The announcement of the minister to review the proposals relating to the A 303, shortly before the panel decision, clearly lends itself to an argument that there is no such certainty.

However circular advice regarding Grampian conditions, whilst given in the context of general housing permissions, does not address the unique circumstances of Stonehenge and the reliance on a road scheme as part of a national project, which is outside the control of the applicant. Legal advice, with which your officers agree, is that there was no detriment to granting planning permission, subject to a Grampian condition, which requires that the development cannot commence without the flyover having been commenced and if there is concern about this aspect, without the closure of the A 344. Therefore, whilst the position of the Panel was entirely reasonable, in planning terms these concerns could have been overcome by the use of conditions.

The courts accept Grampian conditions, would tie the delivery of the visitor centre to the A303 road scheme. Government guidance is that where there is uncertainty then such conditions should be avoided. Therefore while the use of Grampian conditions in this case would be lawful, they would not be in accordance with Government guidance.

The root of the problem for Members, if they choose to weigh government guidance over that of the courts, is proving that the use of such a condition (and the level of uncertainty pertaining to it) would result in demonstrable harm. Basically this boils down to the question, 'what difference does it make?' If the road scheme does not deliver the infrastructure improvements envisaged then a perfectly legal condition will mean that the planning permission can not go ahead without further planning consideration.

Turning to the wider picture, it was clear that a number of members were uneasy with a partial or piecemeal implementation of the components of the A303 scheme. For example, concern was expressed that by just conditioning the delivery of a flyover, without insisting on the dualling of the A303, that this could lead to a 'traffic jam in the air'. Further assessment of the use of conditions confirms that if members

are concerned about a piecemeal approach causing problems, then a Grampian condition tying the application to the delivery of all the key elements of the A303 scheme would have been quite legitimate.

The whole of the Environmental Statement accompanying and informing the planning application was based on the published A303 scheme being delivered. In paragraph 1.3.8 of the Environmental Statement the applicants state:

> *"For the purposes of assessing the operational effects of the scheme, the A303 Stonehenge improvement scheme (as described in the published Draft Orders) is assumed to be completed and therefore comprises part of the baseline conditions."*

Therefore should a road scheme be brought forward that differed from the published orders (which may be the case from the ministerial review) then the baseline conditions informing the Environmental Statement of the application would have to be revisited and amended to assess whether the stated environmental impacts of the scheme have changed. This would have to be presented and re-assessed through the planning system. For example without a tunnel the background noise levels when measured at the houses in Fargo Road would be higher, potentially altering the noise calculations that the land train impacts have been based on. There are many other such examples. This strengthens the case for stating that a Grampian condition is appropriate in this case to tie the scheme to the published orders because through their methodology this is exactly what the applicants have done anyway. Therefore rather than being desirable, it can in fact be seen as essential that the council retains a mechanism to review the environmental impacts of the scheme should the assumed baseline conditions change.

Conclusions

Further analysis and legal consideration has reaffirmed the position that a Grampian style condition can be quite legitimately used to tie the delivery the of the visitor centre to the key elements of the A303 scheme. No demonstrable harm can be seen to derive from such an approach, and indeed on reflection it does offer the council a valuable mechanism of reviewing the potential change in environmental impacts should a different road scheme come forward.

The National Need

The starting point in considering the case is that there is a pressing national need to upgrade the facilities at Stonehenge, which is a World Heritage Site and has been the subject of highly adverse comment for many years. This is a highly important piece of the planning balance, because this case will not be one where the inspector and the Secretary of State simply consider the harm to, for example, local residents. That harm will have to be set against the acknowledged pressing national need. The Council has sought to argue that there is a need for upgrading the facilities, and that it is a matter of great significance.

Overall Conclusions

Officers have re-evaluated all aspects of the grounds for refusal. Additional legal advice has been taken. The conclusions clearly indicate that, while members were absolutely within their rights to refuse the previous application, that on closer inspection the detailed planning merits very strongly indicate that this application should be approved.

4. Overview of the Stonehenge Project

To fully appreciate the planning application before committee, it is first necessary to view it within the context of the overall 'Stonehenge Project'. Within the context of this report, the term 'Stonehenge Project' is used to summarise a number of ongoing projects and strategies that are being pursued with the underpinning goals of improving the setting and understanding of the Stonehenge monument and the wider World Heritage Site.

World Heritage Site Designation

Stonehenge is widely acknowledged to be one of the most important monuments in the World. It has also become an international icon, and attracts visitors from all over the world.

Stonehenge along with Avebury and its associated sites were inscribed as a single cultural World Heritage Site under the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) World Heritage Convention in 1986. This designation places an international obligation on the host nation for the careful protection and management of the site, to prevent damage to the archaeology and its setting and to ensure its survival for future generations.

Drivers for Change

Subsequent to the designation of World Heritage Site status, a number of key reports were released relating to Stonehenge, which highlighted what was considered to be the substandard nature of its existing situation. In 1993 a report by the National Audit Office described the existing visitor facilities as: "cramped, outdated, and too small to deal with the 800,000 who visit each year". This was echoed by the International Council On Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) 1995 document, 'The English World Heritage Sites Monitoring Reports', which added concerns about the proximity of roads to the monuments in addition to criticising the existing visitor centre. Finally and perhaps most famously there was the report of the Public Accounts Committee of the House of Commons that did not mince its words in branding the existing Stonehenge facilities "a national disgrace".

Together the international obligation of the designation together with the conclusions of the three influential reports acted collectively as the drivers for change.

A Strategy for the Future - The Stonehenge World Heritage Site Management Plan

The response of the Government and its agencies, especially English Heritage who have responsibility for the management of Stonehenge, was to put in place a long term strategy with the imperatives of trying to return the monument to a more respectful setting commensurate with its international reputation, to safeguard its long-term future and to improve the quality of the visitor experience based upon a more meaningful visit informed by a greater understanding of the wider landscape.

The overarching objectives are contained in the Stonehenge World Heritage Site Management Plan. This document was drafted only after comprehensive consultation and many meetings of a working party known as the World Heritage Site Management Group consisting of a wide range of stakeholders; including national and local organisations, landowners and local residents. Salisbury District Council was a member of this Management Group. This document represents a consensual approach to identifying objectives for improving and managing the long-term conservation and enhancement of the World Heritage Site. In brief the key aims of the management Plan are:

- Secure the management of the World Heritage Site landscape so that its outstanding value is conserved and where possible enhanced
- Increase public understanding and interest of the World Heritage Site
- To strive for a sustainable approach to the future management of the World Heritage Site which balances archaeology, nature conservation, visitor access and agriculture

- To maximise the economic and cultural benefits of the World Heritage Site to the local communities without compromising the archaeological value of the site
- To map out a prioritised and achievable programme of action.

The Management Plan has been adopted by Salisbury District Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance to the adopted Local Plan and hence carries significant weight as a material consideration when considering the application before committee.

Delivering Key Objectives of the Management Plan - The Stonehenge Project

In very basic terms the application we are currently considering is a direct response to the drivers and strategy adopted above.

English Heritage working with key partners; the Highways Agency and National Trust under the guiding government offices, identified some key opportunities for trying to meet one of the core objectives of the Management Plan which is to seek to remove inappropriate 20th Century development from the setting of the monument and to return it to a more respectful chalk downland setting. To realise this objective a 'Stonehenge Vision' emerged which outlined the following:

- Placing the A303 in a tunnel as it passes the stones to remove its impact
- The closure and reinstatement of the existing facilities to remove their impact
- The closure and reinstatement of the A344 to remove its impact
- A new 'world class' visitor centre built outside of the World Heritage Site plus transit system to and from the monument.

These objectives are being pursued in three main ways:

- The English Heritage Stonehenge Visitor Facilities and Access Scheme, the subject of this planning application
- The National Trust Stonehenge Estate Land Use Plan, published in 2001 in support of WHS Management Plan Objectives, it describes detailed proposals for extended grassland around Stonehenge
- The Highways Agency A303 Stonehenge Improvement Scheme, which includes dualling the A303 and placing it in a tunnel, provision of a flyover at Countess Roundabout and a by-pass for Winterbourne Stoke.

It is critical to remember that no one is claiming that the above projects represent a panacea for all of the issues affecting the World Heritage Site; rather they represent an attempt to address some discreet but important objectives within the wider Management Plan strategy.

The roads scheme is properly being pursued under the correct highways regulations and has been the subject of a Local Public Inquiry, the outcome of which is, at the time of writing this report, still awaited. The remainder is being pursued through this planning application.

Salisbury District Council have also adopted a Planning Brief for a new Visitors Centre on land to the east of Countess Road as supplementary planning guidance to our adopted Local Plan. This brief is concerned with when, where and how the replacement facilities will be secured. It defines rigorous planning criteria that any planning application will be assessed against. It will therefore be an important document in this case, against which a detailed scrutiny of the proposals will be evaluated later in this report.

Conclusions

The drivers for change are well known and throughout the process there have been very few people who say that nothing should be done. There is a strong consensus that the existing facilities are something of an embarrassment when seen through the eyes of the world. However, differences do emerge when the question of 'what should be done?' is debated.

It is important that the application can now be seen within the context of a long-term strategy for the World Heritage Site. It will help us to make an informed decision if the bigger picture is understood. However, that said, this application must be determined upon it own planning merits and decisions should not be swayed by extraneous issues outside of the remit of this planning authority. Nevertheless it was considered important to refresh members' minds on the bigger picture we are operating within.

5. Description of the Site and Its Surroundings

The Countess East Site - Proposed location of the Visitor Centre

The Countess East site lies immediately outside the Stonehenge World Heritage Site in a location which previous archaeological work has shown to be free from significant archaeological constraints. It is located to the north east of Countess East roundabout at the junction of the A303 trunk road and the A345 Countess Road. The upgrading of the A303, which is a key part of the Stonehenge Master Plan, will be completed by 2008/9 subject to statutory procedures. This upgrading includes provision of a flyover at Countess Roundabout. The A303 provides one of the main connections from London to the West Country.

The site is often described as the "teardrop site" because of its shape. It comprises approximately 28 hectares (70 acres) and is currently under agricultural use (grades 3 & 4).

The site is bounded to the east by the River Avon, which is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The A303 forms the southern boundary except the southwest corner, which is a Granada roadside service area (a Little Chef, a Travel Lodge and a Shell petrol station). Residential ribbon development along the A345 Countess Road forms the western boundary and the northern tip is a woodland area.

The northern half of the site slopes down towards the River Avon. This gradient and planning constraints - most notably an odour constraint caused by the nearby sewage plant - limit its suitability for development. The area along the A303 is flat and provides the best vehicular access onto the site from the A303 with site egress being provided via a left-only turn onto Countess Road. It is therefore likely that the building and associated car and coach parking will be located in the southern area of the teardrop site and carefully screened from the residential ribbon development along the Countess Road.

The character of the Stonehenge World Heritage Site

The World Heritage Site is characterised by predominantly open, rolling agricultural land, with fields bounded by hedges. Small plantations and coppices punctuate the area, but the largely open aspect means there are good views into the distance, often to the ridgelines of gentle escarpments. The area is scattered with a great number of visible archaeological features such as barrows, ditches and of course the megalithic stone circle of Stonehenge itself. The largely open aspect does provide a high level of intervisibility between these archaeological features.

The World Heritage Site should not be considered a homogenous landscape, but is rather characterised by a number of distinct character zones. For example the area around the Stonehenge monument is often referred to as a bowl or amphitheatre, and is distinguished by high number of intervisible barrows in an open setting, framed by distant views to higher ground of surrounding ridgelines and plantations. There is a further distinct character area to the eastern area of the World Heritage Site of the River Avon Valley, which meanders through often heavily wooded floodplains.

To the east of the Stonehenge amphitheatre lies King Barrows Ridge, which is occupied by a high number of burial mounds, many of which are now enclosed in a mature tree belt. This ridge performs an important function in dividing the eastern portion of the World Heritage Site, visually into two, as you cannot acquire views past it from Stonehenge. The land between King Barrows Ridge and the Visitor

Centre site comprises of predominantly open agricultural land utilised for both arable and livestock. It is a gently undulating chalk downland landscape punctuated by hedgerows, dry valleys and coppices.

6. Appraisal of the existing Visitor Facilities.

It must be emphasised that even though the existing facilities have been branded a 'national disgrace', a view many would agree with, this does not mean that any alternative should be grabbed with both hands. Indeed the state of the existing facilities in no way circumvents the obligations upon this Authority to take a decision on the current application based on planning policy and all other material considerations. However it is important for Members to be appraised, as with any application, of the existing site and surroundings so that the current plans can be placed in context.

The existing facilities comprise a large at grade, metalled car park accessed off of the A344 adjacent to Stonehenge. Access to the monument is via a ramp and steps to a partially underground visitor centre which contains a café (no internal seating) a shop and ticket booth, English Heritage promotions hut, management offices, and an area for collection of information wands and WC's. Visitors walk under the A344 via an underpass and emerge next to the monument. The buildings are a mixture of concrete, timber and portable style and have no overall architectural coherence or merit. It appears as if the centre has grown in a piecemeal fashion over the years giving a disjointed and awkward relationship between the building and its setting. The at grade car park is prominent in the landscape and can be seen as a backdrop to the monument from several key distant views such as from King Barrows Ridge to the east.

During the summer an overspill car park, enclosed by a wooden post and rail fence, occupies grassed areas to the north of the metalled car park.

Without prejudice to this application, in design terms the existing facilities are of a very poor quality indeed. It lacks any discernable underpinning design concept other than pure functionality. The palettes of materials and surface treatments do nothing to unite the buildings or lift the overall impression of crude, concrete 1960's brutalism.

The impact of the centre of the existing facilities on the monument is quite shockingly detrimental. One of the most important and famous structures known to mankind is right next to a very poor quality collection of buildings and a car park with no redeeming architectural merit whatsoever.

7. Summary of Relevant Site History

There is a comprehensive list of all the planning histories included at Appendix 1 to this report. This details the many planning applications that have been made in relation to the application site. The majority are not relevant to this application. The application of most interest is detailed below.

Application reference 91/0700 - Outline application for the erection of visitor centre facilities, car park, access road, removal of existing visitor facilities and appropriate reinstatement on land at Larkhill. This application was refused on the following grounds:

- Detrimental to the character of the Special Landscape Area.
- The access route is unacceptable because of the impact upon the Cursus

The most pertinent history is that of planning application S/2004/0001,which was submitted by English Heritage in 2004 and subsequently refused by the council in 2005. The refusal reasons were as follows:

Reason 1

The proposal as submitted relies upon the provision of a passenger transit system known as the 'land train', within the World Heritage Site.

The applicants have failed to demonstrate that the transit system, in terms of its length, width, height, frequency, route and specification does not have an adverse impact upon:

4. the archaeology of the World Heritage Site (including the Cursus),
5. the visual setting of the World Heritage Site and
6. the amenities of local residents.

The proposal is therefore considered to be contrary to policies, DP1, HE1, HE2 of the Wiltshire County Structure Plan 2001 and G1, G2, CN20, CN22, CN24, C1, C2 of the adopted Salisbury District Local Plan 2003.

Reason 2

The proposal as submitted to develop the new visitor centre for the World Heritage Site of Stonehenge relies fundamentally upon the provision of a flyover at Countess Roundabout, as part of the A303 Trunk Road (Stonehenge Improvement) Orders.

The requirement to provide a safe access to the site and maintain the free flow of traffic upon the A303 at Countess Roundabout is critical to the authorisation of this proposal. It is not considered that the applicant has demonstrated that this can be delivered within a reasonable time scale, which enables the conditioning of the flyover to the proposed development, in accordance with government advice contained within Department of the Environment Circular 11/95.

The recent decision of Government that a detailed review of the options to ease congestion on the A303 is to be carried out has exacerbated the level of uncertainty regarding the flyover. Therefore in the absence of any clear and reasonable expectation of the flyover taking place, it is considered that the proposal for the Visitor Centre should not be approved.

The proposal as submitted is therefore considered contrary to policy DP2 of the Wiltshire County Structure Plan 2001 and policies G2 and TR12 of the adopted Salisbury District Local Plan, 2003 and the Countess East Planning Brief adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance in December1999.

The application before members is an identical resubmission of that refused as detailed above. Therefore a key consideration for members is whether the two refusal reasons are still considered sustainable and justifiable grounds or has this second application raised issues, which has lead to different conclusions.

8. Description of the Proposals

A detailed analysis and full appraisal of the design and impacts of the various components of the scheme will be included later in the report. This section is simply factual; to inform members by describing what planning permission is being sought for.

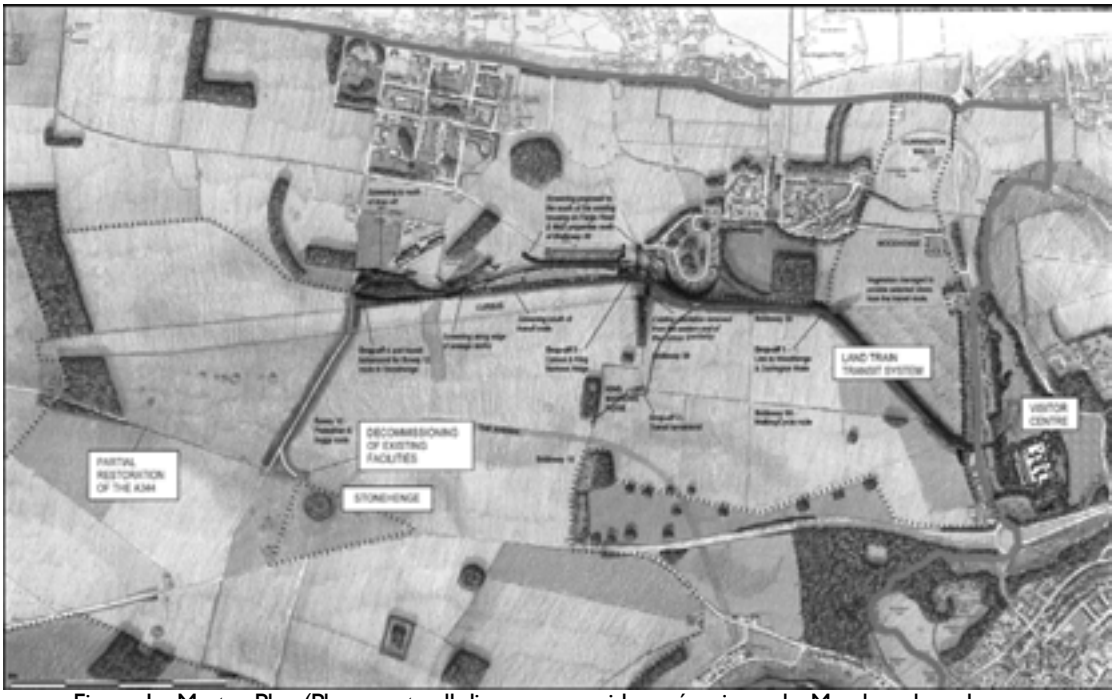

Figure 1 - Master Plan (Please note all diagrams are aides-mémoire only, Members have been supplied with full copies of all full sized plans on the CDRom and all plans are also available on the council website or at council offices)

Visitor Centre Building - External Design

The new Visitor Centre is proposed to be located outside the World Heritage Site on farmland to the east of Countess Road. The size of the site is approximately 280,000m^2 (28 ha) and its boundaries are as identified in the 1999 Planning Brief. The site is north of Amesbury Town Centre and lies some 3.3km to the east of Stonehenge

The floor space of the proposed new Visitor Centre is approximately 6147sq.m (0.5 ha). The building is designed as a low, single-level structure of abstract form, which sits embedded in the gentle upper slope of the river valley landscape. The building represents a low-key structure, the principle public face of which is a simple, long, sweeping front wall, some 4.7 metres high, clad in steel, with a single gap in it which is the main entrance. This wall is twisted in places so that it catches the sunlight in different ways.

Figure 2 - Front Elevation of new Visitor Centre

Beyond the front wall the building is cut into the ground levels and although it may appear to be underground this is not the case. In architectural terms it is a fairly simple building comprising a number of parallel dividing walls, which look like seams within the landscape. The predominantly grassed roof extenuates this, which mean that the size, internal layout, function and design of the building will not be readily discernable. When viewed externally, from behind the entrance wall the building will represent a number of ribbons embedded in a bank of earth.

Visitor centre - internal Layout

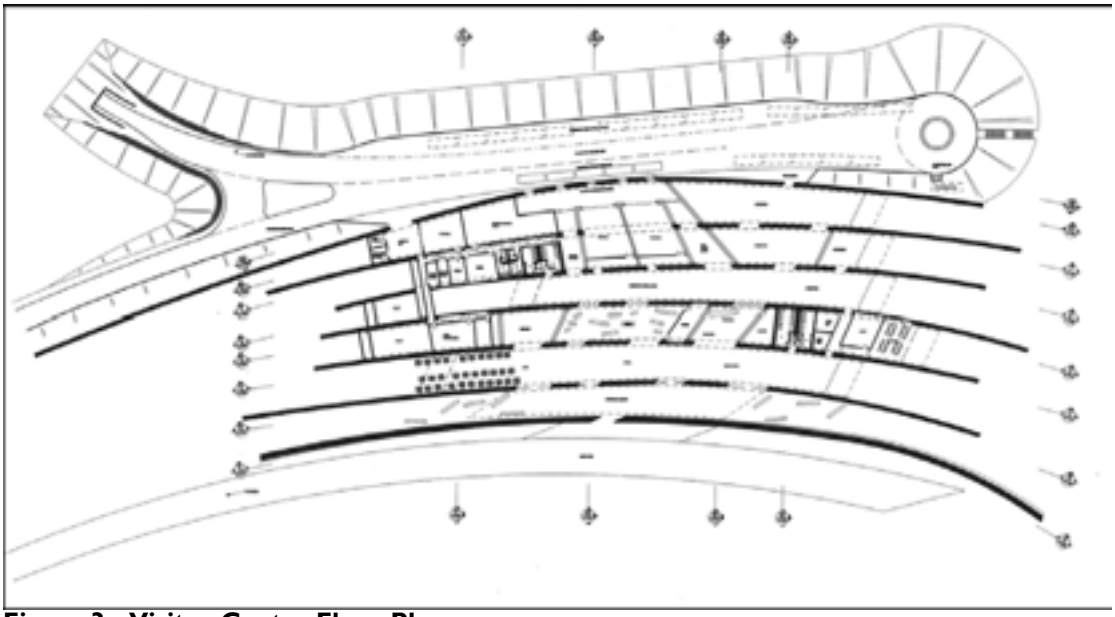

Figure 3 - Visitor Centre Floor Plan

The application states that the Visitor Centre will contain 'high quality' interpretation facilities including exhibition spaces and theatres; an orientation and ticketing area; research and corporate/community/educational facilities; general visitor facilities including first aid/toilets; ancillary retail and catering; administrative and operations accommodation; integral transit station; and tourist information plus English Heritage and National Trust membership areas. The building is designed to have a capacity of some 1500 visitors at any one time (projected maximum numbers at peak time are 1100)

Behind the main entrance and front wall, there is a covered entrance area with some seating. This leads through to an orientation area, which will offer basic information to visitors about the facilities on offer and options for their visit. This area will include directional signage to the main facilities such as ticketing desks, toilets, café, and meeting points as well as providing direct access of dedicated rooms/lecture theatres for school/academic use (capacity of 30 pupils). Both the shop and café would be accessible from the orientation area without the need to purchase a ticket. The café is proposed to be of the self-service type with a main seating area for 150 people. Extra seating will be provided on very busy days.

From the orientation area the visitor would pass through the ticketing via one of three ticketing desks into an exhibition and interpretation area. The three main exhibition areas would hold up to 260 visitors and it is envisaged that they would spend some 30 minutes in this area. The content of the exhibitions is yet to be decided (and this is largely an operational decision not one for the planning authority) but seem sure to be based around archaeological finds, inter-active displays and multi-media presentations aimed at fostering an understanding of the monument and its relationship with the wider World Heritage Site, as well as theories regarding how and why it was constructed.

In conjunction with the exhibitions, two audio-visual theatres are planned to provide short presentations. These would have an hourly capacity of approximately 1200 visitors, more than enough to cope with projected visitor numbers.

To the rear of the building will be the embarkment and disembarkement area for the land train trip to the World Heritage Site. This area has a capacity in excess of 140 visitors and will have automatic doors aligned to those of the train, synchronised in a similar way to the modern London Underground stations.

The building has been designed to be sustainable and low energy through the incorporation of solar orientation via south facing windows, low profile façade to minimise heat loss, glazing located to maximise natural daylight and ventilation, and a grass roof, also to minimise heat loss. More detailed measures include energy efficient lighting, water consumption, heating cooling, and electricity consumption. A

detailed analysis of the sustainable credentials of the project is included in the planning analysis section of this report at page 63.

Access, Parking and Egress at the Visitor Centre

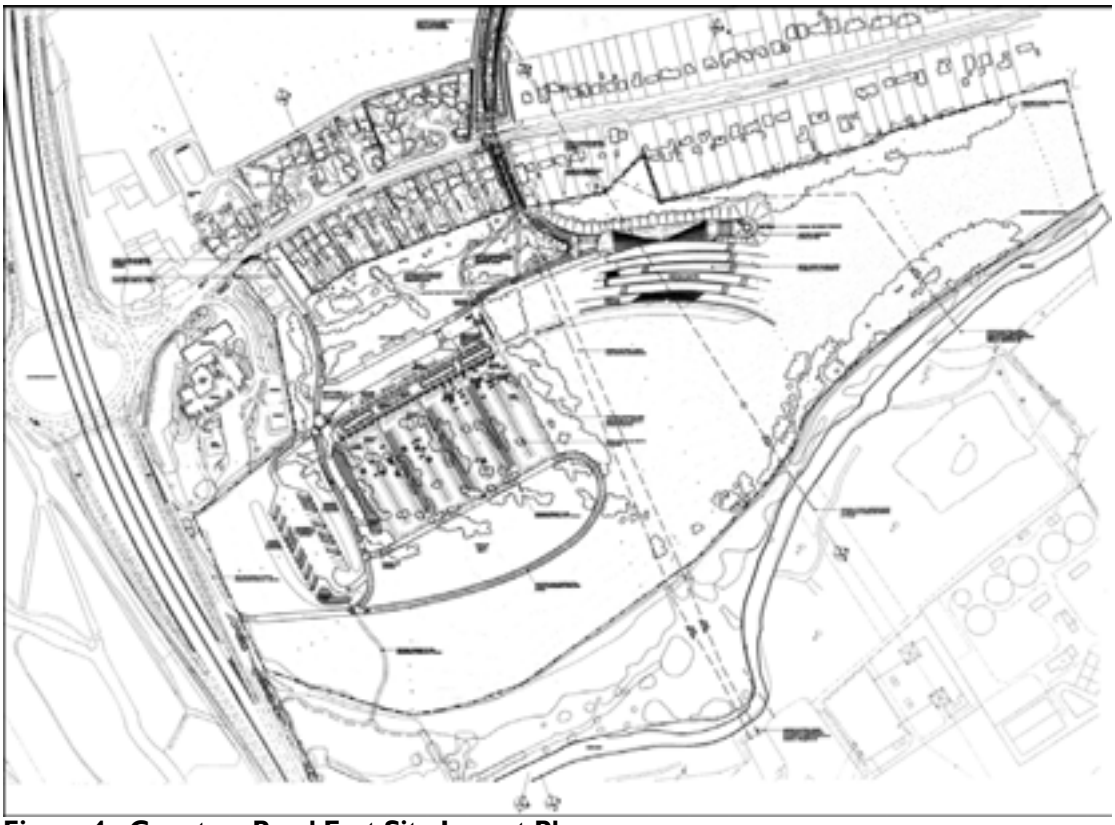

Figure 4 - Countess Road East Site Layout Plan

Cars and coaches would enter from the eastbound lane of the A303, sharing the slip road to the existing service area. From this slip road the vehicles would follow a narrow one -way road that runs through a meadow setting enclosed by trees. Coaches would be directed left and travel through a planned open wooded landscape to a stopping point where passengers would be dropped off before the empty coach progresses to the coach parking area to the south of the site. Cars would continue on the entrance road, which is designed to give them a brief glimpse of the visitor centre through the break in the trees, an attempt to produce a sense of arrival and excitement in the visitor. Conscious effort has been made to make the entrance experience one of traveling through a country lane.

In contrast to the rural feel and curving lines of the approach road, the car park is designed on rigid geometric lines comprising four rectangular compounds. The design incorporates landscaped bunds to effectively screen the car park from neighbouring residents and views into the site. The parking area itself is proposed to be a bound aggregate surface to the access roads and sprayed bitumen to the car park, which will be interspersed with clumps of trees to soften its impact. The design philosophy of this component is that while landscaping will be used to make it a pleasant experience, there is no point trying to disguise the fact that it is a car park and that the distinction between early 21st century man made landscape is deliberately to contrast with the natural landscape of the World Heritage Area one is about to enter.

The visitor centre would include the following provision

- 581 car parking spaces including 43 disabled/family spaces
- 30 coach parking spaces
- 40 secure cycle parking stands
- 36 motorcycle parking spaces

Vehicular egress from the site is via a dedicated exit road to the east boundary of the site, out onto Countess Road. This egress is some 65 metres north of that serving the Countess Services and some 150 metres north of the Countess Roundabout. This egress shows both exiting vehicles to be able to turn left or right and this will be discussed in detail under the planning considerations section of this report at section 16, page 50.

Figure 5 - Proposed Car and Coach Park

Access to the World Heritage Site - Transit System

The starting point to acknowledge is that members have already accepted the principle of development on the Countess East site by the adoption of a Planning Brief as Supplementary Planning Guidance. Once this was accepted it was always implicit that there would be the need for a transit system to take visitors to and from Stonehenge. Indeed the adopted brief makes this explicit

A land train transit system is proposed to move visitors from the new visitor centre, under countess road via a tunnel and to a choice of drop off points within the World Heritage Site.

It is proposed that the land trains would depart from the visitor centre via a tunnel under Countess Road and then take a route across the north eastern part of the World Heritage Site adjacent to the route of the existing Bridleway 37, which occupies the route of a disused military railway (known locally as the Apple Track). At the point where this track bends from a north westerly direction to westerly is a proposed interim drop off point (referred to as Drop Off 1), which will allow visitors to explore (via existing public footpaths) Woodhenge, Durrington Walls and the remainder of the northeast area of the World Heritage Site.

From Drop Off 1, the land train continues in a westerly direction adjacent to Bridleway 30, the land train route splits at a junction just to the south of the residential development known as Strangways. Initially the land train will head south at this point broadly following the alignment of Bridleway 12 to Drop Off 2 which is to the east of King Barrows Ridge. The drop off point here is served by a shelter, which is

described below and is sited on formerly developed land occupied by Seven Barrow Cottages (no longer standing). This drop off point cannot be viewed from Stonehenge as it is to the east of King Barrows Ridgeline. It is only when visitors walk to Byway 10 that they see the Stonehenge amphitheatre and the monument itself. This Drop Off gives visitors the option either to view the Stones from a distance and then return to the Visitor Centre, re-board a land train to gain closer access to the stones, or walk to the stones along the ancient processional route of the Avenue. The walk from this drop off point is fairly challenging as one must descend and ascend a fairly steep dry valley and the walk covers some 1.65km (1 Mile). It would take about 25 minutes.

After Drop Off Point 2 the train would return north, parallel to Bridleway 39 to Strangways where it would branch to the east and follow a route just to the north of the easterly most extent of the large archaeological, oval ditch system known as the Cursus. Here is Drop Off point 3, which allows good views of Stonehenge Monument and amphitheatre.

Finally the land train will run east, to the north of the Cursus and south of the residential properties of 50-120, Fargo Road (known as the Steel Houses) to a drop off point at Durrington Farm. This is the final drop off point and is north of Stonehenge at the head of By Way 12. Here it is proposed there will be a second shelter (the other is at Kings Barrows) and visitors will be able to take a fairly easy, level walk, emerging from an existing wooded area, south along Byway 12 to Stonehenge. Due to topography and existing mature landscaping, this drop off point is not visible from Stonehenge Monument itself.

It is envisaged that the majority of visitors will take this latter option as it leaves the easiest access to the stones as well as providing access for the mobility impaired by allowing for wheelchair use. Motorised wheelchairs will be provided at this drop off point (they will be stored in the visitor centre and taken out every day).

Visitors could then return to the visitor centre on foot or by re-boarding the land train at either Drop Off 2 or 4.

Design of the Land Train and surface

The application proposes that the actual land train will not be commissioned until planning permission is granted. However in order to allow an environmental assessment of its potential impacts the applicants have described certain specifications, which are as follows:

- A land train of four carriages, one of which houses the power unit
- The carriages would be fully enclosed
- The land train would run on rubber tyres
- They would be powered by low-emission LPG
- They would be upgraded to electric fuel cell propulsion as soon as technology allows
- Each train would have a capacity of 150 passengers
- Each train would have space for at least two wheelchair users
- At peak times a land train would depart the visitor centre at every 10 minutes
- 5 land trains in total would be required
- They would be stored and serviced in an area to the rear of the Visitor Centre.
- They would have a maximum speed of 15 kph.

Indicative illustrations of potential land trains have been submitted with the application although it is important to note that the specific land train to be used will be bespoke and not commissioned until the Stonehenge Project gets the go ahead.

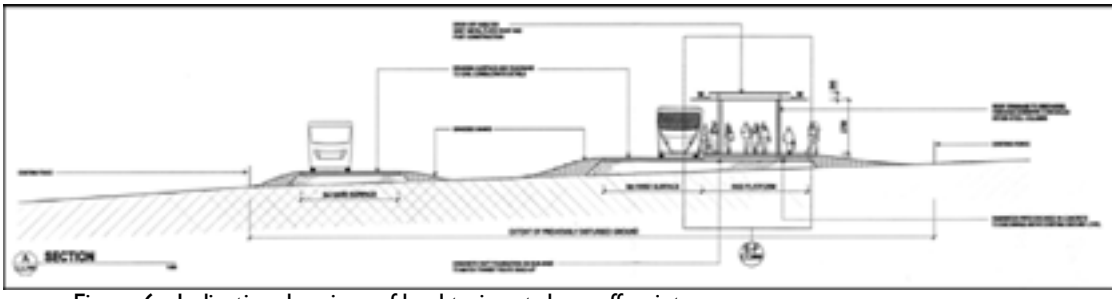

Figure 6 - Indicative drawings of land trains at drop off point

A key feature of the track upon which the land train is to run on is that it has been designed in a manner that lays over the surface of the ground, meaning that it avoids disturbance of archaeology. Secondly it is reversible meaning that it could be removed at a later date without any lasting damage to the environment. The construction of such a track is fairly complex, but in very basic terms it comprises of laying a tough, porous membrane known as a geogrid over the ground and building up layers of aggregate such as crushed limestone and capping it off with a bound aggregate surface. This bound surface has dual benefits of preventing spread and thinning of the aggregate while also reducing tyre noise. At its highest point the land train track will be some 0.4 meters above ground level. To provide members with some context, at its highest point the land train track will be approximately the height of an A3 piece of paper.

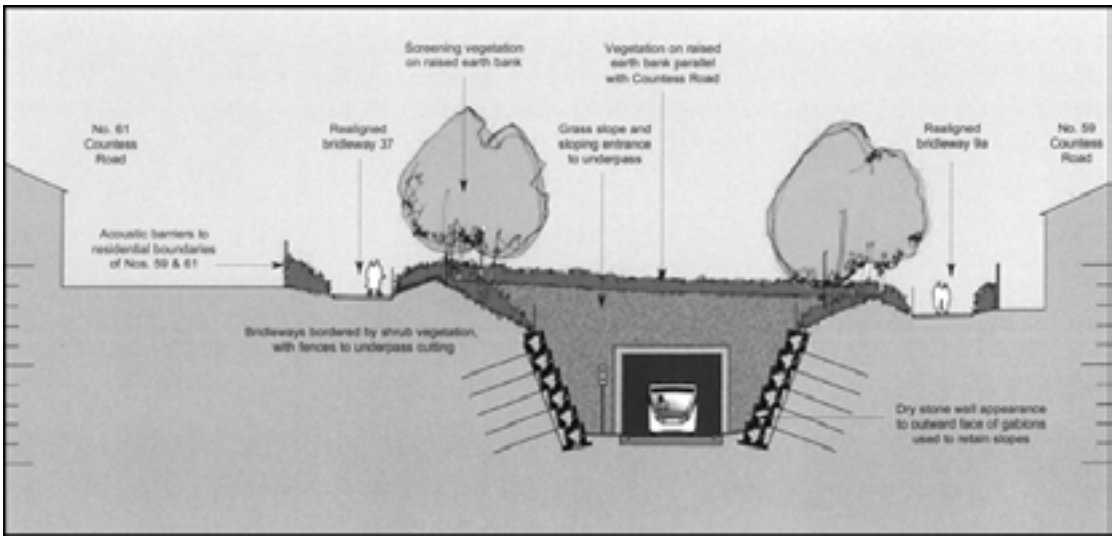

Figure 7 - Cross section of land train tunnel under Countess Road

Access To The Stones

On arriving at the Stone circle, access arrangements will remain in place. The Stones will be roped off and viewing will take place from a circular walk around the monument. Direct access to the Stones will be by prior arrangement only. This does not form part of the application under consideration.

Adaptation Of Existing Facilities

The existing visitor centre and car park near the stones will be decommissioned, removed, and their footprints restored to grassland. All surface level existing development will be removed. Unobtrusive accommodation for wardening staff, emergency facilities, equipment storage and limited toilet facilities will be provided in a 'bunker-style' structure concealed under a reinstated ground surface within the hollow currently occupied by the existing shop, snack bar and underpass. This residual facility has been designed under a grassed roof so all that will remain will be two discreet entrances at either end.