



Figure 8 - Existing Car Park

Decommissioning and Remodelling of the A344

The proposals include the partial removal of the A344 between Airman's Corner and the stones, and adaptation of retained surfaces to provide footpath, cycle-way and bridleway and occasional access for farm, emergency and estate management vehicles. A shuttle bus from the new visitor centre will use this route to provide access for severely disabled visitors and parties who have booked full access visits to the Stones out of normal hours. The A344 between the stones and its junction with the A303 at Stonehenge Bottom will be completely removed and restored to grassland by the Highways Agency as part of the A303 improvements should they get the go ahead.

Diversion of by-ways

The land train route will predominantly run adjacent to existing byways as described above, however there a number of occasions where a byway diversion order is required, one part of which is being sought under this planning application. The diversion of Bridleway 37 and Bridleway 9A is required to accommodate the cutting for the land train tunnel underneath Countess Road (A345) and may be carried out by this council under Section 257 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

Two further diversions, to Bridleway 39 and to Byway 12, fail the legal tests for the Planning Acts and hence will need to be pursued under section 119 of the Highways Act 1980 and section 116 of the Highways Acts respectively.

Under grounding of power cables:

Two 33KV power lines that cross the Countess East Site would be diverted as part of this project. They follow the line of a former military railway. These cables are to be buried underground to re-emerge on the east bank of the River Avon.

The 132kv national grid power line, which currently crosses the site, does not form part of this application. However Scottish and Southern Power have drawn up plans to have these cables diverted underground in due course under permitted development rights.

Demolition of Residential Property

3 Properties on Countess Road, which are owned by the applicants at 14,16 and 18, are to be demolished to allow for the egress onto Countess Road. These have been purchased by the applicants to facilitate this.

9. Description of the Consultation and Publicity Measures Employed

The following steps were taken in order to engage with consultees and neighbours in order to give them a reasonable opportunity to comment upon the planning application. The consultation has been carried out in two phases. The first when the application was initially received and the second when supplementary information was supplied by the applicant to further clarify their proposals and to respond to issues raised via the first consultation process.

Consultation and Publicity - On receipt of the planning application

Statutory Consultees

Formal consultation to 105 consultees.

Councillors

All elected members of Salisbury District Councillors were notified.

Neighbours

11,479 households in the Northern Committee Area were individually notified.

Other Publicity measures

In order to try and ensure wide scale public engagement, the following publicity measures were also carried out:

- A public exhibition in Amesbury Library staffed by the Case Officer and supported by display boards. This event was advertised in advance in the local press.
- Over 100 Site notices were displayed around the World Heritage Site and neighbouring settlements to attract the attention of the visitor and anyone else that the application had been received and there was an opportunity to submit comments.
- Quarter page press advertisements were placed in prominent locations within the local newspapers.

Parish Councils

All Parish Councils in the Northern Committee Area were consulted.

Dedicated WebPages

Dedicated WebPages holding all the application details including full set of documentation, plus summaries, Questions and Answers, copies of the World Heritage Site Management Plan and Countess Road Planning Brief, Frequently Asked Questions, summary of the process and latest news was built. It was accessed via the SDC Corporate WebPages and linked into the fully interactive planning pages allowing

not only viewing of the plans but also the opportunity to submit comments online. Copies of the application in both hard and electronic format could be requested online.

Time frame

The opportunity for comments ran for 6 weeks as opposed to the standard three employed by Salisbury District. This was a reflection of the complexity and scale of the proposals and the commitment of the council to give stakeholders a meaningful opportunity to view the proposals and to send in their comments.

10. The Response of Consultees

Out of the 105 consultees consulted (including Parish Councils) representations were received from 73 organisations.

Because of the nature and complexity of the proposals, many consultees made lengthy submissions that covered much ground. Therefore it is not possible to detail the issues raised here without swamping this report, and therefore this reports represents a summary of the main issues to emerge. **However all representations made regarding this application from consultees special interest groups, neighbours and others are available for inspection at the Planning Office.**

Organisation	Consultation response on 1st application	Consultation response on 2nd application
Amesbury Town Council	REFUSE Location (too far from the Stones), disruption to Amesbury and surrounding visitors, impact on residential due to noise pollution, lighting and emissions, additional traffic congestion, road safety, design is not in keeping with the area, contrary to local plan, increased risk to residential security, potential detrimental impact on businesses in the existing town centre, impact of land train track on the World Heritage Site, surfacing of Byway 12 for wheelchair use would have a detrimental landscape impact, no justification for Byway diversions, removal of trees on King Barrows Ridge would severely impact on the landscape.	REFUSE Timing with the roads scheme, wrong location for a VC, visit is too long, reduced economic benefits, will take visitors away from the town, fly parking, parking restrictions to overcome flyparking will impact on locals, need safe attractive routes linking to the town, road safety, noise during servicing will impact on neighbours, lighting could be detrimental to neighbours and the environment, noise impact on neighbours, retained remnant of A344 is against the objectives of removing 20th Century clutter, people will still be bussed to the monument, there is no detail of the land train, the drop off shelters are large and intrusive within the landscape, land train cross over points are not necessary and are detrimental to the WHS, no details of the viewing point at King Barrows Ridge, impact upon archaeological features, problems and danger of accidents with the egress.
Association of Council Taxpayers	REFUSE Too far from the Stones, visual amenity, access, cost, poor location, the tunnel ports of the A303 represent major incursions in the World heritage Site and therefore there is no need for the new VC to be outside, entrance fees will be too high, too expensive to build, resiting closer would save money on the land train, impact on	REFUSE Too far from the Stones, too close to the protected river system, the new VC can be within the WHS, King Barrows Ridge site, commercially based proposals to funnel all visitors through the new VC, roped off Stones will remain, landscaping in car parks out of keeping with the natural landscape,

Organisation	Consultation response on 1st application	Consultation response on 2nd application
	Countess Road residents, noise, pollution, demolition of houses, fly parking in the Woodford Valley, viable alternatives must be examined in depth.	unacceptable to approve this application without an alternative plan should the A303 proposals be rejected, ACT A303 plan would provide an alternative, free concessions for locals is a disproportionate benefit, evidence of economic benefits is overemphasised, Salisbury and its Cathedral will be adversely affected.
Association of Wessex Tourist Guides	REFUSE and REQUEST ADDITIONAL INFORMATION. Members will lose livelihood due to changing nature and pattern of visits.	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Berengaria Order of Druids	REQUEST ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	EXPRESS OBSERVATIONS WITHOUT CLEAR OBJECTIONS OR SUPPORT
British Archaeology Magazine	SUPPORT PROPOSALS AS SUBMITTED	
CABE	SUPPORT and REQUEST ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	NO FURTHER COMMENTS TO MAKE
Coach Drivers Club GB	DID NOT REPLY	
Council for British Archaeology	SUPPORT APPROVAL SUBJECT TO ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	REITERATION OF PREVIOUS SUPPORT
Council of British Druid Orders and Stonehenge Truth and Reconciliation Commission	REQUEST ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Countess Road Residents Group	REFUSE Location, disruption and access.	REFUSE Intrusive landscape planting, vehicle parking at new VC intrusive, loss of hedgerow habitats, encouragement of vermin, opening hours until 9pm is too long and gives no respite, land train will be intrusive within the landscape, Countess East is more archaeologically important than first considered. A detailed itemised critique of the applicant's Supplementary submission then follows which is too long to include here, but generally strongly challenges the assertions contained therein.
Country Land and Business Association	REQUEST ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
CPRE Wiltshire Branch	REFUSE and REQUEST ADDITIONAL INFORMATION. The access proposals would be unacceptably damaging to the World Heritage Site and local amenity and contrary to planning policy and management plan objectives.	REITERATION OF PREVIOUS OBJECTIONS Materials of building unsympathetic, no appropriate assessment, issue of 132KV power lines should be resolved before the application, development will damage the Anglo-Saxon settlement remains at Countess East, timing of the roads is uncertain, limited access points, poor opportunities for sustainability, lack of flexibility for future management, lack of information on buses, doubts about reversibility of new tracks, potential damage to archaeology within WHS, adverse impact

Organisation	Consultation response on 1st application	Consultation response on 2nd application
		of shelters within the WHS, access for the disabled.
Defence Estates (Safeguarding Boscombe Down)	NO OBJECTIONS	NO OBJECTIONS
DEFRA	NO OBJECTIONS	
Department for Culture, Media and Sport		NO COMMENTS
English Heritage (Curatorial)	SUPPORT APPROVAL SUBJECT TO ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	NO OBJECTIONS
English Nature	See separate paragraph below	See separate paragraph below
Environment Agency	REQUEST ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	NO OBJECTIONS SUBJECT TO CONDITIONS
Europae Archaeologiae Consilium	DID NOT REPLY	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Forestry Commission	NO COMMENTS	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Garden History Society	NO COMMENTS	NO COMMENTS
Hampshire Cycling	SUPPORT APPROVAL SUBJECT TO ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Health and Safety Executive	NO OBJECTIONS	NO COMMENTS TO MAKE
Heritage Lottery Fund	DID NOT REPLY	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Highways Agency	NO OBJECTIONS and REQUEST ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	SUPPORT
ICOMOS	REQUEST ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	REFUSE Feel that the application should be deferred until the road scheme has been determined and English Heritage has produced its detailed Tourism Development and Operational Plans which need to be based on consideration of sustainable visitor access strategies to and appreciation and understanding of, the wider landscape of the WHS, not just the Stonehenge Stone Circle.
International Institute of Peace Studies and Global Philosophy	SUPPORT APPROVAL SUBJECT TO ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Larkhill Residents Group	DID NOT REPLY	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Local Farmer (through agent)	REFUSE Premature before A303 decision has been submitted, visitor centre is taking 23.9 ha of prime agricultural land, not beneficial to the landscape, noise levels will increase at Countess Road, the loss of prime agricultural land to a tourist facility is not sustainable development, it will not benefit the local community, diagrammatic representations are misleading as they fail to show continued agricultural practices	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT

Organisation	Consultation response on 1st application	Consultation response on 2nd application
	and structures such as handling facilities for livestock, local transport network will be worsened, Fargo North is more suited site.	
MOD – Defence Estates – Westdown Camp Tilshead	DID NOT REPLY	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
MOD – Headquarters Tidworth Netheravon and Bulford Garrison		NO OBJECTIONS
MOD – Headquarters Larkhill Garrison	DID NOT REPLY	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
MOD Defence Estates – local	DID NOT REPLY	"NEUTRAL ON SCHEME"
National Farmers Union,	DID NOT REPLY	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
National Grid	-	NO OBJECTIONS
National Trust	SUPPORT APPROVAL SUBJECT TO ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	NO OBJECTIONS SUBJECT TO CONDITIONS
Parish Council – Allington,	DID NOT REPLY	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Parish Council – Berwick St James,	DID NOT REPLY	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Bulford Parish Council	REFUSE Waste of public money, lack of access to the Stones by members of the public, increased traffic congestion, will lead to a rat run through neighbouring villages, the visitor centre is too far from the monument and will result in too long a visit, local population will be excluded from daily access to the monument, land train is impractical and undesirable, commercial outlets at the centre will grow and lead to increased congestion.	REITERATION OF PREVIOUS OBJECTIONS In addition, object due to the proximity of the new proposed Waste Disposal facility.
Parish Council – Chilmark		REFUSE No further steps for a Visitor Centre should be undertaken until decisions have been made concerning the A303.
Parish Council – Cholderton,	DID NOT REPLY	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Parish Council – Coombe Bissett		NO COMMENTS
Durnford Parish Council	REFUSE New centre would be too far from the Stones.	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Durrington Parish Council	REFUSE Land train will pass too close to residential properties and will cause a loss of privacy, devaluation in property prices, change in the character of the area and bring a security and safety threat.	REFUSE Unviable, socially intrusive, impact on neighbours, effect on tourism, ill-conceived concept, too far from the Stones, traffic congestion, adverse impact on safety and security, noise and disruption, tourism and economics, consultation by the applicants inadequate.
Parish Council – Figheldean,	DID NOT REPLY	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT

Organisation	Consultation response on 1st application	Consultation response on 2nd application
Parish Council – Firsdown,	DID NOT REPLY	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Parish Council – Great Wishford,	DID NOT REPLY	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Parish Council – Idmiston,	DID NOT REPLY	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Parish Council – Milston,	DID NOT REPLY	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Parish Council – Newton Tony,	DID NOT REPLY	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Parish Council – Orcheston,	DID NOT REPLY	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Parish Council – Shrewton,	DID NOT REPLY	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Parish Council – South Newton,	DID NOT REPLY	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Parish Council – Stapleford,	DID NOT REPLY	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Parish Council – Steeple Langford,	DID NOT REPLY	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Parish Council – Tilshead,	DID NOT REPLY	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Parish Council – Tisbury		REFUSE Too expensive, visitor duration too long deterring further visits to local area, therefore affecting local economy.
Wilsford Cum Lake Parish Council	REFUSE Increased traffic congestion on Countess Road and Countess Roundabout. The Visitor Centre will be too far from the stones.	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Parish Council – Winterbourne Stoke,	DID NOT REPLY	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Parish Council – Winterbourne,	DID NOT REPLY	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Parish Council – Woodford,	DID NOT REPLY	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Ramblers Association,	DID NOT REPLY	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Robert Key MP,	DID NOT REPLY	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
RSPB	NO OBJECTIONS	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Salisbury District Council – Community Initiatives,	DID NOT REPLY	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Salisbury District Council Arboriculture Officer	REQUEST ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	NO OBJECTIONS SUBJECT TO CONDITIONS
Salisbury District Council Environmental Health,	REQUEST ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	NO OBJECTIONS SUBJECT TO CONDITIONS

Organisation	Consultation response on 1st application	Consultation response on 2nd application
Salisbury Tourism Partnership	REQUEST ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Salisbury Transport 2000	REFUSE and REQUEST ADDITIONAL INFORMATION. The application should not be considered in isolation from the road scheme, the application assumes the A303 scheme will go ahead, there has been no Appropriate Assessment under the Habitat Regulations, the travel plan is inadequate.	REITERATION OF PREVIOUS OBJECTIONS
Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings	No comments to make	
South West of England Regional Development Agency (SWRDA),	SUPPORT PROPOSALS AS SUBMITTED	REITERATION OF PREVIOUS SUPPORT
South West Tourism.	SUPPORT PROPOSALS AS SUBMITTED and REQUEST ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	
The Amesbury Society	REQUEST ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	REFUSE Increased traffic congestion, will lead to a rat run through neighbouring villages, the visitor centre is too far from the monument' land train intrusive in the landscape, impact on the amenity of neighbours, application makes no mention of cost, the visit is too lengthy, alternative sites are better suited, loss of visual amenity for residents in Countess Road due to planned landscape screening, waste of taxpayers money, no mitigation for bad weather, free entry for locals is unclear, noise, lighting, lack of toilets en route, uncertainty if the road scheme does go ahead, vibration from land train, diversion of public rights of way, impact on wildlife,
The Avebury society		OBJECTION Land train (generally impractical/unsuitable/inappropriate); Archaeology/Heritage (negative impact on); Land train (overall visual impact, impact of tunnel on Countess Road residents); Visitor experience (drop-off points too far from stones); Transport (changes / negative impacts on footpaths, bridleways, byways)
The Countryside Agency	NO COMMENTS	NO COMMENTS
The Prehistoric Society	REQUEST ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
The Royal Astronomical Society	REQUEST ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
The Stonehenge Alliance	REFUSE This application cannot be determined until a ministerial decision has been made on the A303 scheme, cannot determine until TRO's are determined, transportation plan is insubstantial, not sustainable, impacts on SAC, insufficient	REFUSE Linking this application with the road scheme, absence of detailed travel plan, council cannot carry out a full Appropriate Assessment of the in combination effects until the Inspectors report on the A303

Organisation	Consultation response on 1st application	Consultation response on 2nd application
	information to allow an appropriate assessment, archaeological harm to Countess East site, fails to meet a number of Management Plan objectives, impact of land train on the Cursus, do not believe land train scheme is reversible, shelters would form major intrusions within the landscape, (the Stonehenge Alliance is a group of organisations and individuals opposed to the Governments proposals to widen the A303 between Amesbury and Berwick Down comprising, Ancient Sacred Landscapes Network, CPRE Wiltshire Branch, Friends of the Earth South West Region, The Pagan Federation, RESCUE: The Trust for British Archaeology, Transport 2000, The UK Rivers Network.	scheme is public, risk of flooding, delay in construction of any A303 improvements, there should be a 'Statement to Inform the Appropriate Assessment' to accompany the application, Kings Barrow shelters intrusive in the landscape.
Trail Riders Fellowship	REFUSE Lack of care by EH on rights of way, Byway 12 is a strategic route for byway users and placing restrictions in unacceptable, application assumes TRO will be successful which is not a foregone conclusion, and will be subject to standard procedures which should not be pre-empted, the application is misleading as it states that it would only have a minor adverse impact on recreation, when in fact it would have major impact motorised users, bridleways are being confused with byways.	REITERATION OF PREVIOUS OBJECTIONS
UK Rivers Network	REFUSE Lack of appropriate assessment, lack of consultation on appropriate assessment, lack of a strategic environmental assessment, failure to consider alternatives.	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
UNESCO – The World Heritage Centre.	DID NOT REPLY	NO REPLY AT TIME OF WRITING REPORT
Wessex Water	REQUEST ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	NO OBJECTIONS SUBJECT TO CONDITIONS
Wessexplore	REQUEST ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	
Wilton Town Council		OBSERVATIONS Land train would discourage people from visiting, current site suits short visits which are the majority, upgrading of the visitors centre would be sufficient, proposals are not good value for money.
Wiltshire Archaeological & Natural History Society	REFUSE and REQUEST ADDITIONAL INFORMATION. Long term sustainability of the visitor transit system, the impact upon the landscape of minimally dispersed visitor access patterns, treatment of the early Anglo-Saxon remains at the Countess East site.	REITERATION OF PREVIOUS OBJECTIONS
Wiltshire Bridleways Association	REQUEST ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	
Wiltshire County Council	See separate paragraph below	See separate paragraph below
Wiltshire Fire	REQUEST ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	REQUEST ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Organisation	Consultation response on 1st application	Consultation response on 2nd application
Brigade		
Wiltshire Wildlife Trust	REFUSE and REQUEST ADDITIONAL INFORMATION. A holding objection pending further information related to the building design, energy efficiency, water usage, management of surrounding grounds and visitor centre interpretation.	REFUSE and REQUEST ADDITIONAL INFORMATION. Application premature in absence of decision on A303 scheme; concerns over biodiversity benefits and Appropriate Assessment for the River Avon SAC.

Position of Wiltshire County Council

Representatives of Wiltshire County Council attended the first Consultative Technical Group (CTG) on 25th October 2004, after which they informed Salisbury District Council that they wished all previous written comments to be disregarded and that they would be making one corporate submission, endorsed by their Cabinet after submission of the supplementary information verbally requested at the CTG. At the second consultation, Wiltshire County Council reconfirmed its support for the proposals in principle subject to the following conditions:-

- (i) No occupation of the Visitor Centre until the A303 Stonehenge Improvement is completed.
- (ii) No occupation of the Visitor Centre until the revised layout and access arrangements at Airman's Corner are agreed with the Director of Environmental Services, including agreement of costs.
- (iii) No occupation of the Visitor Centre until a revised coach-parking layout for 40 coaches has been agreed.
- (iv) No occupation of the Visitor Centre until a traffic sign scheme has been agreed with the Director of Environmental Services, including agreement of costs.
- (v) No occupation of the Visitor Centre until a Maintenance Management Plan for rights of way within the World Heritage Site has been agreed with the Director of Environmental Services, including agreement of costs.

Position of English Nature

An Appropriate Assessment is required under the Habitat regulations. It applies to this project both alone and in combination with other relevant plans and projects, which may have an impact on the SAC. English Nature is now satisfied that the applicants have supplied adequate information to allow the Appropriate Assessment to be carried out. English Nature has confirmed that they are broadly happy with the scope and what it covers.

11. The Response of Neighbours and Third Parties

The scope of the consultation process undertaken to attempt to engage the public and interested parties is described at section 9, page 27 of this report.

This section of the report will outline the response of those groups, which shall for the sake of simplicity be referred to generically in this report as neighbours, and a summary of the comments they have raised.

It must be re-iterated that this application is an identical resubmission of the previous application submitted by English Heritage in 2004 (ref: S/04/0001). In view of this all representations made during the original application process have been fully taken into account when considering the current case. Therefore although all views of neighbours were requested it was also made explicit to them that if they had written previously they did not necessarily have to write to raise the same issues again.

Phase I - Response to the original submission.

Table 1 below summarises the gross numbers of responses and the breakdown between objection, support or observations.

Stonehenge Community Engagement - Summary of Response			
	04/0001	06/0700	Total
Number of Notification Letters sent	11,479	11,479	-
Total number of Representations received	851*	77	928
Objections	760	54	814
Support	51	13	64
Observations	40	10	50

(* 381 of these objections were via a petition.)

Table 1 - Summary of Neighbour Notification and Publicity Response

As is clear, the vast majority of neighbours who responded objected to the proposals, in a ratio of nearly 15 to 1 when compared to those who expressed support for the proposals. The response rate of 7% is academic, what does count is that the community were given a meaningful opportunity to comment. Furthermore the very low response rate to this current application should not be taken to mean that public opposition to this application has subsided. It was made clear to all that original comments would be taken into account again and hence many may well have chosen to let their original comments stand without further adding to them.

It is important to analyse in detail the comments raised, as it is not the weight of numbers that matters so much as the material planning considerations that may have identified. A detailed table highlighting the objections to the scheme, your officer's comments and the action taken (if any) to address those objections are included as Appendix 3 of this report (page 114). The community responses often contained more than one reason for their objection and the following represents a broad summary of that response:

Summary of Principle Grounds for Objection

- **Tourism:** 157 people listed tourism as an objection, principally that the centre site is too far from the stones and that the long visit time will deter coach parties and casual visitors. There was also concern that the centre would be detrimental to other aspects of local tourism.
- **Transportation and Highways:** 141 objections were made regarding the affect that the Visitor Centre would potentially have on both national and local traffic, nationally with regard to increased use of the A303 and locally, congestion in the area around the Countess East site. 82 of these objections were in specific relation to access and egress on Countess Road. Exhaust pollution in this area was also cause for concern. 1 person objected to the development on the grounds that the Travel Plan targets were not acceptable.
- **Specific location of the Visitor Centre:** 109 people objected as a result of the specific location of the centre, 47 of these suggested alternative sites as being more suitable, in particular the Fargo plantation site. There was also concern as to the validity of English Heritage's rationale for choosing the Countess East site.
- **Land Train:** 85 people raised objections because of issues with the Land Train. These varied from the route the Land Train would take, to the perceived unsuitability of modern Land-Trains in the WHS. 44 of these 84 objections were

with regard to the affect the train would have on the residents of Fargo Road and Larkhill. 1 person was concerned with the implications of the land train on 'out of hours' visits.

- **Government spending:** 76 people objected in relation to government spending, and 48 of these objectors thought the project was a waste of money. Others suggested that money equalling the cost of the project would be better spent on local hospitals, roads and local facilities. 4 people were concerned that Community Tax would rise to pay for the project.
- **Free Access:** 58 people raised the issue of free access, including the fact that there would no longer be a view of the stones from the A303 and the fact that as the stones belonged to the nation, access should remain free.
- **Local Community:** 53 people expressed their concern that the development would have an adverse affect on the local community, in particular feeling that the needs of the community had been ignored, that local employment may suffer and that property would be devalued.
- **The current site:** 34 people objected on the grounds that the current site was adequate or could be improved.
- **A303:** 33 people objected to the application in relation to the A303 road scheme, 21 of these people objecting on the grounds that the project should not go ahead until the A303 road scheme had been decided. The remaining 12 issues were specifically related to the A303 scheme itself, which does not form part of this application.
- **Crime and Security:** 31 people had concerns about crime, ranging from security issues for local residents, to security issues for the M.O.D, to problems with drug use. 1 person questioned how the fire and ambulance service would access the monument itself.
- **Environment:** 31 people listed environmental concerns as a reason for objection and within this topic issues such as the perceived inadequacy of a Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment and Appropriate Assessment were raised. 10 people were also concerned with the impact of the project on the River Avon.
- **Contrary to planning policy:** 30 of the objections received expressed concern that the development was contrary to planning policy, including the fact that the Countess East site is 'backland' development, and that the development would mean the loss of a greenfield site. Other issues raised were that the development would not be consistent with the local plan or the WHS management plan, that previously a supermarket had been refused permission on the Countess east site, and that the designs were not in keeping with local agreed designs.
- **Archaeology:** 21 objections were received which expressed a concern that the project would have an adverse impact on Archaeology and specifically the Archaeological remains at the Countess East site.
- **Access for the Mobility impaired:** 19 objections related to access issues for the mobility impaired, including insurmountable obstacles for the disabled, those with small children and the elderly.
- **Noise pollution:** 15 people were concerned with potential noise pollution, in areas such as Countess Road, from the land train and, within the WHS itself, questioning the validity of removing '20th century clutter' given the continuing noise pollution from MOD exercises.
- **Visitor Centre Design:** 13 objections were listed concerning the Visitor Centre design, specifically that the centre, train, car and coach parks would be an 'eye-sore', that the car parks would be inadequate, inadequate, and that the centre itself was too large.
- **Parking:** 11 people raised the issue of illegal parking around the WHS with particular regard to the effects on Amesbury and Fargo Road, and suggested that the new development would encourage fly-parking as a result of car-parking charges at the Countess East site.
- **Pedestrian Access:** 9 people objected to the development with regard to pedestrian access. These included concerns that Byway 12 and the land train route would become dangerous for walkers and that the WHS itself would be spoiled for this recreational group. 1 person objected to the proposed Bridleway changes.

- **Wildlife:** 9 people were concerned that the project would have an adverse impact on wildlife.
- **Landscape Character:** 6 people thought that the project would have an adverse impact on the character of the landscape around the Henge itself, including 3 people who objected to the commercialisation of Stonehenge.

Salisbury District Council received several reasons for objection where the number of people objecting totalled 5 or less. For reference, these are all contained in full in the table in Appendix 3 at page 114 but for summary purposes these objections include issues regarding the construction phase of the development, location and design of the drop off points, comments about English Heritage as an organisation, and opinion on what to do with the Stones.

The Council also received several objections raised by only one person, again these appear in full in the table in Appendix 3 at page 114. For summary purposes, these individual objections include issues such as a concern about lighting pollution, accessibility of the WHS for horse-riders, the increased risk of flooding at the Countess East site, the specific issue of screening for nearby residents, and the re-siting of an electricity pylon.

A full and complete list of all objections raised, including the number of objectors for each issue is included in the table in Appendix 3 at page 114

Summary of Principle Grounds for Support

In general people did not tend to give a reason for their support of the project, and of the 64 who expressed support, 32 did not give the reason why. The remainder cited the following reasons:

Landscape of the WHS: 4 people supported the project because it intended to return the monument to its natural landscape.

Improvement of Facilities: 8 people were in support of the improvement of facilities, and included comments commending the benefit for future generations and a suggestion to turn the WHS into an Ancient park.

Transportation and Highways: 8 people gave transportation as a reason for support, including welcoming the closure of the A344/A303 junction, and a suggestion that English Heritage use Grasscrete on the old bed of the A344.

Other reasons given for support ranged from the long-term benefits to wildlife, to support for ensuring increased Tourism in the local area.

No reason given: 32 people did not give a reason for their support of the Stonehenge Visitor Centre project.

Summary of Observations

50 people made observations. These were varied and included comments such as the suggestion that the local youth be involved in the project and a concern for potential vibrational damage to the stones during the construction phase.

12. Section 54 & Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 1994 - Planning Policy Framework

Is the Application in Accordance with the Development Plan?

The consideration of an application for planning permission is undertaken in accordance with the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended). Where the development plan is material to an application, Section 70(2) of the Act requires the local planning authority to have regard to the provisions of the development plan, so far as it is material to the application, and to any other material considerations. Where, in such circumstances the development plan is material to the proposal, Section 54A requires the application to be determined in accordance with the adopted development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Therefore the Planning System is a plan led system, legislation and guidance from government is explicit that when considering any planning application local planning policy is the place to start. There must be a rigorous analysis of the proposals to test whether they are in accordance with the development plan. Only then should all other material considerations be taken into account to evaluate the suitability of the proposals.

The contents of this report at the beginning, outlines the systematic approach that will be taken to scrutinising this application to ensure that the proper consideration of the plan led system is observed. The importance of planning policy cannot be overstated. If any application is contrary to policy then they should properly be refused unless other material considerations raise exceptional circumstances that merit setting them aside. Similarly if the application can be demonstrated to comply with policy then this introduces a strong presumption to recommend approval for the proposals unless again that is outweighed by other material planning issues.

The Development Plan

The relevant development plan for this application comprises the policies in the following adopted local plans:

- Wiltshire Structure Plan (adopted January 2001)
- The Wiltshire and Swindon Minerals Local Plan (adopted November 2001)
- The Wiltshire and Swindon Waste Local Plan (awaiting inspectors report from Revised Deposit Draft)
- Salisbury District Local Plan (adopted June 2003)

Relevant Policies

The full policy documents are available for viewing or purchase from the respective local authorities as well as available on the Internet. The main topic areas are highlighted in brackets after each policy (below) and this represents a summary on part of the Case Officer.

Wiltshire County Structure Plan (adopted April 2006)

- DPI (Priorities for Sustainable Development)
- DP2 (Infrastructure)
- T3 (Public Passenger Transport)
- T5 (Cycling and Walking)
- T8 (Transport Provision for New Developments)
- T12 (A303 Stonehenge Transport improvements including Flyover at Countess Roundabout)
- C1 (Maintenance and enhancement of nature conservation resources)
- C2 (Protection of Areas of Nature)

- C3 (Protection of Areas of Nature)
- C5 (the water environment)
- C9 (Special Landscape Area)
- C12 (Protection of best agricultural land)
- HE1 (Protection of the World Heritage Site)
- HE5 (Protection of World Heritage Sites and scheduled ancient monuments)
- HE7 (Safeguarding architectural and historic heritage)
- RLT1 (Provision of recreation and leisure facilities)
- RLT2 (Improving informal countryside recreation)
- RLT8 (Proposals for new and improved tourist attractions)
- W1 (Waste management; reducing, re-using and recovering waste)
- W2 (Provision of recycling facilities)

The Wiltshire And Swindon Minerals Local Plan (Adopted November 2001

There are no policies of relevance within this part of the development plan.

The Wiltshire And Swindon Waste Local Plan (Awaiting Inspectors Report On The Revised Deposit Draft)

- Policy 10 (Waste Audit)
- Policy 14 (Provision for recycling in applications for major development).

Salisbury District Local Plan (June 2003)

- G1 (General principles for development)
- G2 (General criteria for development)
- G3 (Protection of the water environment)
- G4 (Development and flood risk)
- G5 (Water supply and mains drainage to new development)
- G6 (Surface water disposal)
- G7 (Development restraint area)
- G9 (Planning obligations)
- G11 (Control of signs and advertisements)
- D1 (Design criteria)
- D7 (Site analysis)
- CN20 (Ancient monuments and archaeology)
- CN21 (Archaeological evaluation of development sites)
- CN22 (Preservation of archaeological remains)
- CN23 (Archaeological investigation prior to development)
- CN24 (Protection of the World Heritage Site)
- C1 (Protection, restoration and improvement of the natural beauty of the district)
- C2 (Control of new development within the countryside)
- C6 (Special landscape Area)
- C8 (Replacement of landscape features lost during development)
- C10 (Protection of wildlife conservation areas)
- C13 (Retention and enhancement of existing wildlife habitat)
- C12 (Protected species)
- C17 (Conservation of river habitats)
- C18 (Protection of water quality)
- C19 (Protection of best agricultural land)
- TR11 (Off street car parking provision)
- TR12 (Transportation provision for new major developments)
- TR13 (Extension to footpath, cycleway and bridleway network)
- TR14 (Secure cycle parking)
- TR16 (Retention and expansion of existing bus and rail services)
- R17 (Improvement and increased use of public rights of way network)
- R18 (Expansion of public access to the countryside)
- TI (Development of new tourist attractions)

- T2 (Development of new tourist attractions in the countryside)
- T3 (New visitor centre for Stonehenge).

Analysis of the Proposals in relation to the Development Plan.

Broadly the development plan policies relevant to this application can be divided into two categories; those which relate to the fundamental principle of allowing the development and then those, which seek to control any development so that environmental protection is ensured, and the social and technical infrastructure to support it are in place.

First we must analyse whether the planning application is in accordance with the explicit principals of the local plan or whether policies dictate that it should be refused. After these conclusions have been reached we shall then turn to the whether the proposals can meet those more general policies which set out specific criteria for ensuring it is delivered in an acceptable manner. Only after this policy analysis should we look at all other material considerations and evaluate whether there are overriding reasons for setting policy aside.

The Principle of Development

Key policy considerations are expressed in policies C2 and T3 of the Salisbury Local Plan (2003) and policy C12 of the Wiltshire Structure Plan.

These policies are worth quoting here, as it is important that members give full consideration to the principal of development and they will dictate how the rest of the considerations will take shape.

C3 Development in the countryside will be strictly limited and will not be permitted unless it would benefit the local economy and enhance the environment.

T3 It is proposed that a new visitor centre will be provided for the Stonehenge World Heritage Site.

C12 Local Planning Authorities will protect the best and most versatile agricultural landform non-agricultural development. Exceptionally, where there is an overriding need for development on best and most versatile agricultural land, which cannot be met elsewhere.

C2 states that development in countryside will be "strictly limited" unless it benefits the local economy and maintains or enhances the local environment. The supporting text (para. 7.6) makes it clear that exceptions can be made to this policy of constraint including for "limited" recreational and tourist development. The exceptional, unique nature of this project is that it is designed to enhance the WHS, which is of international importance.

To comply with this policy the planning application must comply with both of the criteria outlined in the supporting text, those of a local economic benefit and also enhance the local environment.

With regard to the first, realising benefits to the local economy, Section 26 of this report at page 65 highlights the perceived economic benefits for the local economy in detail. In summary these include expenditure on goods and services by English Heritage and other organisations involved in the operation of the visitor centre, the creation of 47.5 full time jobs in the operation of the new visitor centre, up to 275 full time jobs in all including non-direct and induced employment, the equivalent of 38 full time jobs during the construction process, and the increase in average dwell times of the attraction will encourage visitors to make a day of their visit and hence increase the likelihood of a combined visit to Amesbury or Salisbury. On the first test it is considered that there are definite and tangible economic benefits that this scheme will deliver. In this respect the application complies with policy C2.

Turning to the second criteria, can the application be considered to enhance the local environment? We must take a balanced look at the overall aims of this scheme. While it is leading to new development on

Countess Road East site, it is also leading to the removal of both the A344 and the existing facilities immediately adjacent to Stonehenge within the central core of the World Heritage Site. This can only be considered a net gain in environmental terms. The removal of the 20th century incursion so close to Stonehenge will contribute to returning the Scheduled Ancient Monument to a more respectful setting fitting of its international status and value. The new development is outside of the World Heritage Site land, which should therefore be considered less environmentally precious. Furthermore the design and lay out of the facilities are of an extremely high quality and subtle design, which seeks to keep their impact minimal. Therefore with regard to the second key test the application is considered compliant with policy C2.

Policy T3 clearly identifies that the provision of a new visitor centre for the Stonehenge World Heritage Site is an objective, which will be supported by the council. This policy when considered in conjunction with policy C2 examined above brings the logical conclusion that the application before committee is in compliance with the Local Plan.

The final point of principal is that with the Wiltshire Structure Plan, policy C12, which basically states that the best agricultural land needs to be protected from development. The 'best and most versatile land' as defined by the Government (DEFRA) is classified as grades 1,2,and 3. The Countess East Site is designated Grade 2 land. The supporting text with the policy makes it clear that this land should only be developed if there is an overriding need that cannot be met elsewhere. The need for a new visitor centre to serve Stonehenge has long been accepted as an exceptional need as expressed through policy T3 of the Salisbury Local Plan and the unequivocal injurious impact the existing visitor facilities have on the Monument and its wider setting.

The exceptional need for the new visitor centre having been established, it must be examined whether alternative sites are available that would help safeguard the best agricultural land. The analysis of site selection and consideration of alternatives is contained in section 19, page 57 of this report. As there is a very strong presumption against new development within the World Heritage Site, this narrowed options for the alternative visitor centre. The environmental assessment of alternative sites is compelling and taking a view of all land use constraints the Countess Road Site does emerge in planning terms as the most acceptable site. Therefore in relation to policy C12 the proposals are considered to accord with its provisions as exceptional need that cannot be elsewhere has been demonstrated.

The unique and exceptional circumstances related to the case, the overwhelming international, national and local agreement that something needs to be done to improve the WHS, the environmental and economic benefits to be gained, together with the lack of feasible alternatives all lead to the unavoidable conclusion that this planning application is in accordance with those provisions of the development plan, which will permit the principal of development.

Other Policy Considerations of the Development Plan

Although the principal of this proposal in this specific location is in accordance with the Local Plan, as the supporting text to Policy T3 makes clear any scheme submitted will not automatically be considered acceptable and other policies of the development plan will need to be taken into account when evaluating its acceptability. Many of the policies listed above as being relevant to this application will be applied to specific facets of the application, (e.g. access, landscape, sustainability etc) under the assessment of key planning issues, which follows (see part 16 page 50 onwards). However it is important that the need to test the application against the development plan does not become lost or forgotten as detailed considerations are focused on. Therefore the following paragraphs represent an overview of the relevant policy area that the remainder of the report will evaluate the scheme against.

General Development Policies

Wiltshire Structure Plan, policies DPI and DP2

Salisbury Local Plan, policies G, G2, G3, G4, G5, G6, G9

These policies set out general criteria that planning applications should meet. In summary these criteria involve ensuring that development contributes to the objectives of sustainability, promote the vitality and viability of local communities, conserve both the natural and built environments, minimise environmental

impacts and are supported by necessary infrastructure. See section 16 page 50 onwards, for a detailed appraisal of the general principles of the development

Design

Salisbury Local Plan, policies D1, D7

These require that a high quality design, which respects its wider setting and is based on a concept that draws on the unique character of its context should be brought forward. See section 16 page 50 for a detailed analysis of design.

Conservation

Wiltshire Structure Plan, policies, HE1, HE5, HE7

Salisbury Local Plan, policies, CN20, CN21, CN22, CN23, CN24

The objective of these policies is to seek to protect those features, sites and settlements of the historical, architectural and archaeological interest which contribute to the District's and nation's character, whilst ensuring that where new development occurs, it respects and wherever possible, enhances the environment within which it is located. A detailed analysis of the conservation merits of the proposal can be found at section 31 on page 73.

The Rural and Natural Environment

Wiltshire Structure Plan, policies C2, C3, C5, C9, C12

Salisbury Local Plan, policies, C1, C2, C6, C8, C10, C13, C12, C17, C18, C19

Collectively these policies seek to strike a balance between preserving and enhancing the quality and character of the countryside in terms of the landscape and nature conservation, promoting a healthy, modern and sustainable rural economy and ensuring a high quality of life for rural communities. The detailed analysis of the impact of the application on the rural and natural environments is found at 61

Transportation

Wiltshire Structure Plan, policies T2, T4, T5, T7, T11

Salisbury Local Plan, policies, TR11, TR12, TR13, TR14, TR16

The underpinning idea of these policies is to seek a sustainable transportation and land use strategy which minimises the need to travel, reduces reliance on the private vehicle and encourages greater use of public transport, walking and cycling, whilst providing good accessibility and promoting economic vitality within the district. The detailed appraisal of the transportation implications of this application can be found at page 80

Tourism

Wiltshire Structure Plan, policies RLT1, RLT2, RLT8

Salisbury Local Plan, policies, T1, T2, T3

The overall objective of this part of the development plan is to promote Salisbury District as a tourist destination for all types of visitors, whilst recognising the need to protect the environmental quality of the District and the quality of life for its residents. Analysis of the implications of this proposal on tourism in the area is described in the planning issues below at page 64

Waste and Recycling

Wiltshire Structure Plan, policies W1, W2

The Wiltshire And Swindon Waste Local Plan, policies I0, I4

These policies seek to ensure waste is managed in a manner that seeks to protect the environment for current and future generations.

Development Restraint Area

Policy G7 basically places a zone around sewage facilities within which development in regular occupation should not be permitted. This is to protect new residents and occupiers from the potential odour problems, which might arise. This is known as a 'cordon sanitaire'. In this case the sewage plant is at Ratfyn and is approximately 400 metres north-east of the proposed Visitor Centre. The VC itself lies within the Development Restraint Area, however car park and access elements of the proposal are outside of it.

In paragraph 2.15 of the text of the Local Plan, it is noted that during the plan period, statutory sewage undertakers in the district will be developing specific modelling techniques to define site-specific odour dispersion areas. Whilst SPG has not been adopted in respect of this, an independent exercise was carried out in 2003, commissioned by Wessex Water, to quantify the extent of odourous emissions from this treatment works. The modelled results gave an indicative zone of 300-400m around the sewage works.

Given this further information on zoning, the fact that the affected part of the site is predominantly indoor, and the location of the site to the south-west of the sewage works in an area of predominantly westerly winds, although G7 is an important consideration it does not appear to form a compelling reason for refusal. A further factor is that Wessex Water do not object to this application and has indicated that steps could be taken to further reduce the potential for odour through adaptations to the sewage treatment facilities.

The Development Plan - Conclusions

The planning application is in accordance with those policies of the local plan, which apply to whether or not the principal of development is acceptable. However this does not mean that this irrevocably leads to an approval of this application. As outlined above there are a raft of policies, which seek to control the nature of the development to ensure it is environmentally acceptable. These issues will be analysed in section 16 of this report below. Furthermore, once these policies have been scrutinised there is a further systematic approach we shall take to look in turn at other planning policy guidance at a local, national and international level and then a thorough examination of all other material considerations.

Therefore while the principal of development is in accordance with the development plan, this means that it has only cleared the first hurdle.

13. Supplementary Planning Guidance

Whilst only the policies in the development plan can have the status that Section 54A of the 1990 Act provides in deciding planning applications, Supplementary Planning Guidance (from here on referred in this report as SPG) may be taken into account as a material consideration. The Secretary of State will give substantial weight in making decisions on matters that come before him to SPG, which derives out of and is consistent with the development plan, and has been prepared in the proper manner. SPG should be prepared in consultation with the general public, businesses, and other interested parties and their views should be taken into account before it is finalised. It should then be the subject of a council resolution to adopt it as supplementary guidance. Salisbury District Council has a number of documents that have been adopted following these procedures and hence they are an important consideration in determining this planning application.

Stonehenge World Heritage Site Management Plan

This document was adopted by Salisbury District Council as SPG to the Local Plan on the 26th January 2000. It has also been adopted by Wiltshire County Council as SPG to the Structure Plan.

The Management Plan before Committee represents the Government's recognition of this obligation under the UNESCO World Heritage Sites Convention and summarises proposals to prevent damage to

Stonehenge and its setting and to ensure its survival for future generations. The Management Plan also goes far beyond the obligation and crystallizes the Government's vision as originally set out in the Stonehenge Master Plan for the enhancement of the World Heritage Site and Stonehenge, through proactive measures such as a new Visitor Centre, tunneling of the A303 and closure of the A344.

The Management Plan has been prepared following guidelines prepared by the International Committee on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS): the expert body that advises UNESCO in providing objectives for the future management of the Site. In accordance with ICOMOS guidelines, the Management Plan has been drafted to establish a strategic framework for management based on analysis of the Site's significance.

The Management Plan identifies and acknowledges the importance of a wide range of mechanisms, both statutory and non-statutory, which already exist for the protection and/or management of the World Heritage Site. In this way it co-ordinates all of these instruments into one document in a manner that will provide an invaluable source of reference and cohesive cross-organisational approaches. Therefore the Management Plan includes the statutory planning policy framework, which exists to protect and manage the World Heritage Site as well as the roles of many organisations and individuals who are actively involved in managing the landscape. In this manner the Plan provides guidelines to direct management towards clear priorities and helps to encourage and enable others to take similar action. Furthermore this partnership approach helps to ensure that objectives defined in the Plan are achievable given the constraints of law and practices carried on within the World Heritage Site.

(a) Key Objectives

The key objectives of the draft Management Plan fall into three broad 'policy' areas within which detailed management priorities are set. The three key policy areas are as follows:

- The establishment of a framework for long-term decision-making on the conservation and improvement of the cultural heritage values of the WHS, based on achieving, wherever possible, a consensus amongst those bodies and individuals that constitute the Management Group
- The provision of guidance for the improved management and conservation of the overall character and integrity of the WHS as a total cultural landscape, as well as its constituent parts
- The promotion and interpretation of the importance of the whole Stonehenge WHS to increase understanding and conservation of the cultural assets, and to enhance the potential of the heritage resources for public enjoyment, education and academic research.

(b) Detailed management objectives

Within the broad parameters set out above, the Management Plan frames some explicit objectives in a manner that prioritises and focuses the actions of all stakeholders involved in the process. Specifically the Management Plan seeks to achieve the following:

- The creation of a larger area of restored open grassland, which will improve the setting of Stonehenge and other monuments
- The closure of the A344 and the dualling and placing of the A303 in a tunnel as it passes Stonehenge

- The removal of the existing visitor facilities and parking and the creation of a new world-class centre at a location outside the World Heritage Site
- The improvement of site interpretation to enhance visitors' enjoyment of the World Heritage Site as a whole
- More public footpaths and the provision of alternative means of public and managed open access to Stonehenge and the World Heritage Site as a whole
- The improvement of nature conservation values such as the creation and conservation of maintenance of flower rich chalk grassland
- The continued conservation and improvement of the archaeological sites and the promotion of an associated archaeological research programme
- The spreading of the economic benefits of tourism at Stonehenge to the wider locality
- The promotion of an integrated approach to transport for the World Heritage Site which will both benefit local people and improve visitor enjoyment of the site.

There is no doubt that the planning application before committee, should it go ahead, would represent a major step forward in helping to realise some of the key objectives outlined above. It should be emphasised again that there have been no claims that the Stonehenge Project is a 'once and for all' solution to the problems in this areas (See Page 15 for a summary of the Stonehenge Project), rather it is seen as an important step forward in an ongoing process of trying to meet the objectives of the Management Plan. The multi-agency work will not cease whether this application is successful or not. However when looking at the aims of the Management Plan it is unequivocal that the planning application before committee represents an opportunity to make some major progress.

A New Visitor Centre for Stonehenge at Countess Road East, Amesbury, Planning Brief, December 1999

This was adopted by Salisbury District Council as SPG to the Local Plan on the 27th October 1999.

The Planning Brief also sets out specific planning criteria, which the development of the new Visitor Centre and associated facilities at the Countess Road East site will be expected to meet. The criteria provide the context for the preparation of a planning application (or applications) and have been identified by reference to the development plan policies of Salisbury District Council and Wiltshire County Council, central Government guidance and detailed evaluations of the environment, landscape, archaeology, highway network, access routes and economy of the Stonehenge area.

The Planning Brief also provides guidance on the format of any future planning application (or applications) for a new, high quality Visitor Centre and environmentally sustainable transport link. The key planning criteria as set out in the Brief are:

- Delivery of the 'highest quality' tourist facility
- Retail and catering facilities to be ancillary to the main use and not compete with Amesbury Town Centre
- Incorporation of mitigation measures to protect the amenity of neighbouring residents, including siting, landscaping and screen planting
- High quality design required
- Mitigation of archaeological impacts
- Traffic Impact Assessment
- Discouragement of rat-running through northern settlements
- Parking provision

- Green travel plans
- Disabled access
- Mitigation of noise impacts
- Protection of the River Avon Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Site of Special Scientific Interest.
- Protection of water quality
- Ensuring adequate drainage
- Ensuring signage is adequate and of high quality
- Ensuring the site is adequately and sensitively lit
- Creation of a development that provides a safe and secure environment
- A strategy for boundary treatments
- Demonstration of how the development may enhance local community facilities
- Mitigation of environmental impacts of the transit link.

This SPG does not write a blank cheque for development to progress at the Countess Road site, rather it introduces a presumption that the principle of development should be acceptable provided the application can demonstrate that it can comply with the detailed planning criteria set out above. In this manner these criteria supplement and reinforce the planning policies of the development plan set out at section 12 above which seek to control development and ensure it is environmentally acceptable. As with the development plan, the application is tested against the specific criteria of the planning brief in section 16, which follows and contains a detailed analysis of the planning issues of the case.

Furthermore 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

Supplementary Planning Guidance for Waste Audits

Adopted by Wiltshire County Council and Swindon Borough Council in March 2005.

This SPG specifically buttresses policies 10 and 14 of the Wiltshire Structure Plan and seeks to ensure that from the outset, new development is implemented with the principle of sustainable development at its core. It encourages the optimum use of resources through the demolition and construction process and for the waste resources generated by occupation and operation to be captured at source.

Specifically it requires that all new development be subject to a waste audit prior to commencement, which will establish volumes of waste the facility will produce and then identify opportunities for recycling and more efficient consumption. Section 22, page 51 of this report examines the sustainable credentials of the proposed building in detail.

Creating Places

The adopted district-wide design guide, which is Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Local Plan.

Creating Places supplements the design policies in the development plan and sets out detailed design criteria to both help developers achieve high quality designs appropriate to their specific context and criteria against which the council will scrutinise applications. The underpinning principles of the guide are that of removing some of the subjectivity regarding what constitutes good design, by adopting classically derived and government adopted criteria for appraising schemes (see Commission of the Built Environment). It also emphasises the need above all of securing designs which reflect the unique characteristics of any given place and do not seek standardised solutions. Applications must be accompanied by an adequate design statement, which highlights the intellectual design concept for the proposals, including how it responds to the vernacular context.

A full critique of the design quality of this application can be found in section 15, page 39 of this report, however regarding the first qualification, members should be aware that the applicants submitted an

excellent design statement, which highlights in detail the philosophy and inspiration behind the scheme. Later in report we shall see if the approach is considered an appropriate one

14. National and Regional Planning Policy

National, Government policy on planning matters is expressed in a series of documents known as Planning Policy Guidance (from now on referred to PPG's), and the emerging series of new guidance called Planning Policy Statements (PPS's).

The guiding ideology that underpins all Government guidance is that decisions on development proposals should be based on sustainable development principles, ensuring an integrated approach to the consideration of:

- Social inclusion, recognising the needs of everyone;
- Effective protection and enhancement of the environment;
- Prudent use of natural resources; and
- Maintaining high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.

Of particular relevance this planning application is the following guidance:

Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development
Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas
Planning Policy Statement 22: Renewable energy
Planning Policy Statement 23: Planning and Pollution Control
Planning Policy Guidance 9: Nature conservation
Planning Policy Guidance 10: Planning and waste management
Planning Policy Guidance 13: Transport
Planning Policy Guidance 15: Planning and the historic environment
Planning Policy Guidance 16: Archaeology and planning
Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for open space, sport and recreation
Planning Policy Guidance 21: Tourism
Planning Policy Guidance 24: Planning and noise
Planning Policy Guidance 25: Development and flood risk

Key regional Planning Guidance is contained in:

- RPG 10 Regional Planning Guidance for the South West (2001)
- Future Foundations: Building a Better South West - A Sustainable Construction Charter for the Region (Sustainability South West)
- A Sustainable Future for the South West: A Regional Sustainable Development for the South West of England (South West Regional Assembly/sustainability South West).

As with the analysis of the development plan carried out above, national guidance may be considered to have both an underpinning philosophy against which the principle of the planning application may be evaluated. It also sets out a raft of specific guidance, which is topic based and serves to safeguard particular aspects of the environment. However, there is an important distinction between national policy and the development plan in that the latter has primacy. Indeed one of the prime purposes of the national guidance is to inform and shape the policies of the development plans. Therefore as we take a detailed look at the planning issues in the following section it will be made clear to members whether specific issues related to the application are considered to comply with national as well as local planning policy.

Is the Principle of Development Supported?

Turning to the question of the principle of development, government and regional planning guidance is aimed at securing sustainable patterns of development, which are inclusive, environmentally sensitive, utilise natural resources prudently and contribute to economic growth and employment.

With regard to issues of sustainability and environmental protection, the principle of creating a visitor centre on the Countess East site represents the most acceptable solution in terms of maintaining the integrity of the World Heritage Site. Furthermore and in line with PPS7, the selected site is the most proximal to Amesbury town centre, which would enable opportunities for local services and businesses to generate income from visitors exploring the area. Additional economic growth would be accrued from additional expenditure on goods and services by English Heritage and other organisations involved in the operation of the visitor centre, the creation of 47.5 full time jobs in the operation of the new visitor centre, up to 275 full time jobs in all including non-direct and induced employment, the equivalent of 38 full time jobs during the construction process, and the increase in average dwell times of the attraction will encourage visitors to make a day of their visit and hence increase the likelihood of a combined visit to Amesbury or Salisbury. It is considered that there are definite and tangible economic benefits that this scheme will deliver meaning in this respect the application complies national and regional guidance

The application does seek to address the needs of all sectors of society. A statement of community engagement shows that the applicants have made extensive arrangements for engaging with all groups including travelers, druids and the disabled. The scheme does include measures to try and cater for the needs of all. For example special arrangements will continue at solstice as a acknowledgement of the spiritual importance some place on the monument, while the scheme also addresses the needs of the mobility impaired with all buildings and land train being fully DDA (Disability Discrimination Act 1995) Compliant and electric wheelchairs being provided at drop off points.

A sustainability appraisal has been submitted by the applicants to explain how they feel their scheme will address energy efficiency and the responsible use of natural resources. A detailed analysis of these measures is covered in section 22, page 51, to follow. However in broad terms the measures they are proposing, such as maximisation of natural light, passive solar gain, green roof for insulation, high efficiency gas boilers, water saving technology, travel plans for staff, sourcing and use of sustainable materials, all contribute to meeting the requirements of national policy.

Finally we must evaluate whether the application can be considered to enhance the local environment. We must take a balanced look at the overall aims of this scheme. While it is leading to new development on Countess Road East site, it is also leading to the removal of both the A344 and the existing facilities immediately adjacent to Stonehenge within the central core of the World Heritage Site. This can only be considered a net gain in environmental terms. The removal of the 20th century incursion so close to Stonehenge will contribute to returning the Scheduled Ancient Monument to a more respectful setting fitting of its international status and value. The new development is outside of the World Heritage Site land, which should therefore be considered less environmentally precious. Furthermore the design and layout of the facilities are of an extremely high quality and subtle design, which seeks to keep their impact minimal.

Conclusions

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.

15. International Guidance

The Convention

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) seeks to encourage the identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity. This is embodied in an international treaty called the [Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage](#), adopted by UNESCO in 1972.

What the Convention contains

The Convention defines the kind of natural or cultural sites, which can be considered for inscription on the World Heritage List. The Convention sets out the duties of States Parties in identifying potential sites and their role in protecting and preserving them. By signing the Convention, each country pledges to conserve not only the World Heritage Sites situated on its territory, but also to protect its national heritage. The States Parties are encouraged to integrate the protection of the cultural and natural heritage into regional planning programmes, set up staff and services at their sites, undertake scientific and technical conservation research and adopt measures which give this heritage a function in the day-to-day life of the community.

Conclusion

While it may be the case that the proposed solution put forward to solve the problems within this planning application has not met with universal support (see Appendix 3, page 88, comments of neighbours), from the amount of time, resource and research that has been expended to bring this project to fruition, as well as the extensive documentary evidence supplied to support this application there is no doubt that this application has been formulated to make a significant contribution to the aims of the Management Plan. It has overriding aims of restoring Stonehenge to a more respectful setting, free of obtrusive 20th century developments, with improved access, improved interpretation and understanding and encompasses a long-term vision for securing the future existence, enhancement and enjoyment of this iconic site. As such the application unequivocally complies with the obligation the Convention places on the UK.

16. Assessment Of Key Planning Issues: Design Of the Proposals

At both a national and a local level the importance of placing good design at the heart of all new development is increasingly being recognised and reinforced. At a national level this is reflected by the commitments made within Central Government Policy documents together with the publication a wide range of good practice guidance documents such as Places, Streets & Movement (September 1998) By Design (2000) and the Urban Design Compendium (August 2000).

No two sites will share the same landscapes, contours, and street patterns, built context or relationship to space. It is unlikely therefore that a scheme already built elsewhere can be successfully copied to a new site. Salisbury District Council will now require developers to demonstrate that each proposal draws upon the individual character and context of that particular site and is not a repetition of a scheme built on countless occasions across the country. No two sites will share the same landscapes, contours, and street patterns, built context or relationship to space. Therefore a new building should be designed to respond to its unique context.

As well as looking at how the building responds to its context, it is also important that conclusions on its design are not the result of an arbitrary and subjective reflex response to how it looks, but are rather based on an objective appraisal of the scheme looking at nationally agreed criteria for evaluating design.

These criteria can be found in our emerging Supplementary Planning Guidance, Creating Places as well as much CABI documentation. These are included in Appendix 4 of this report.

The Site Layout

It is proposed that the Countess East site be laid out with extensive car and coach parking sited towards the southeast with the visitor centre north of it sited towards the southern boundary. It is the case that the visitor centre in particular will be in fairly close proximity to the rear gardens of the properties in Countess Road and so in siting terms this does not appear the best solution. However the layout plan does respond to a number of constraints applicable to this site, such as keeping development away from the Special Area of Conservation and Site of Scientific Interest in the River Avon valley which forms the eastern boundary of the site, and keeping land re-profiling to a minimum by choosing areas with the gentlest topography. Furthermore very extensive archaeological appraisal of the site also contributed to the siting of the various elements.

In general terms, providing that the amenity of neighbours can be satisfactory mitigated (see section 16, page 42 below) it is considered that the layout is one that responds sensibly to the constraints of the site.

The Visitor Centre Building

There must have been a temptation when designing a visitor centre for such an internationally renowned site as Stonehenge to try and compete with the monument, to design a building, which is a monument to the skill and imagination of the architects. This is partially true; because the true excellence exhibited in its design is that it is hardly recognisable as a building at all. There are no signs of egotism; instead the visitor centre is willfully understated and low key. It states in its language of design that you are only going to see one monument on your visit and nothing will be allowed to compete with that.

By being 'hardly a building at all' this is meant as the highest compliment. The metal front wall stands proud of the ground but is twisted and contorted and with weathering it will resemble nothing so much a fault line or fissure in the earth, where a bedding plane has been exposed. It will merge into the landscape and become almost a geomorphological feature. This is very much reinforced by the roof of the building being grassed between horizontal ribbons of the buildings structure. By designing a building that will merge and almost become a part of the site the building responds in an ingenious way to the contextual cues.

To emphasise the low-key nature of the building the dimensions have been carefully compared to those of Stonehenge itself to ensure it does not compete. For example the top of the lintel of the tallest trilithon in Stonehenge is 7.4 metres, while the height of the front wall of the visitor centre is confined to 4.7 metres.

A defining part of the design concept was to design the new building so that it acts as a transition zone between the humdrum life of 21st Century living and the extraordinary, enigmatic and timeless ambience of the World Heritage Site.

The Car Park

Both CABI and the Salisbury Design Forum have raised question marks over the functional and rigidly geometric design of the car and coach park. Your officers requested that the applicants give further consideration to this issue. There appeared to be something of a dichotomy between the quality and imagination displayed in the building design and that lacking from the car park.

The design philosophy behind the car park is stated to be consistent with that of the building. That is the experience of visiting Stonehenge will be one characterised by a transitional journey from a 21st Century Environment to the timeless landscape beyond, leaving behind cars and car parks and houses and so on. As such there was considered no point trying to hide or disguise the fact that this was a car park, as this was impossible, instead it was designed to be unapologetically so and as such could be used as the starting point for the concept of the visitor's journey back in time. It also responds to physical constraints of the site, principally, ecology, archaeology and topography. Also although it has a geometric layout it is proposed that it will be discreetly hidden being comprehensive landscape planting and banking to its

perimeters and trees planted throughout. The result of this will be that the car park will be difficult to view from outside of the site and the only real encounter with it will be through parking there.

While concern has been expressed over the design of the car park, it is what it is. There is no way in which it could be designed so that the user would not know that they were in such a facility. The approach of a geometric design does fit in with the overall concept of the experience and substantial landscape contouring and planting will render it very inconspicuous from outside of the site. It does have a measure of architectural integrity. Overall it is not considered that concerns raised represent sustainable reasons for refusing this application and indeed it is the view of your officers that subject to controls to ensure the comprehensive landscaping is secured and maintained, that the car park will actually form an important and perfectly pleasant part of the overall Stonehenge development.

The Land Train and Track

The land train will only be commissioned should planning permission be granted and hence this is a difficult situation. However the applicants have been requested to produce detailed specifications and examples of the few existing land trains which operate in order that we may have something which to evaluate.

The most important appraisal of this element of the scheme is its impact on the landscape, archaeology and neighbours, which are analysed in detail in paragraph 3.23 above.

The Adapted Existing Visitor Centre

Whilst the car park and above ground manifestations of the existing centre will be removed it is proposed that an operations facility will be retained to cater for security, WCs and emergency first aid.

This will be housed underground on land already disturbed by the existing facility with a grassed roof contoured into the surrounding chalk downland. The only outward manifestations would be an access ramp and steps plus minimal wire safety fence for Health and safety reasons.

It is considered that this represents an excellent means of supplying an operations centre adjacent to the stones, while for all intents and purposes removing all impact away from the monument. This meets key development plan and objectives.

Conclusion

The new visitor centre represents an innovative design, characterised by flair, subtlety, and an in depth understanding of the aims of the Stonehenge Project and its context. The low-key nature of the building and the philosophy of engaging the visitor in a journey from one environment to another are both carefully considered and realised. It is a building, which almost effortlessly appears eminently appropriate for its setting and function. It is a building, which, once appraised in detail, is difficult to see any other fulfilling the same role as well. That is the mark of not just good design but of excellence.

17. The Views of Neighbouring Residents

As members will note this proposal has brought many significant objections from the local community. The detailed comments of neighbours along with the response of officers and any actions proposed are included at Appendix 3 of this report. However, it is possible to summarise the principle areas of concern and explain whether these constitute material planning reasons for refusing this planning application. The commentary below represents only a broad summary of all the issues, which are detailed in Appendix 3.

The application is in the wrong place

This is the most common objection and the justification ranges from neighbours concerned about loss of amenity, to people who have grown accustomed to the current very convenient access and do not wish the status quo to change.

The analysis of alternative sites and land train routes is assessed at page 44. The clear conclusions to come from the site analysis is that in environmental and policy terms it is the best available site for the location of the visitor centre. It is outside of the World Heritage Site, close to the existing town centre of Amesbury and is served by good communications. In planning terms the existing site is in a poor location and does great harm to Stonehenge. Other sites, which have produced popular support, especially at Fargo Plantation, are in planning terms worse than Countess Road in that they would cause archaeological damage, would introduce new development in to the World Heritage Site in a manner contrary to policy and do not have the synergy with the existing urban area that will help bring economic and sustainable dividends.

It will cause traffic Congestion, more accidents and rat running

The detailed highways considerations are discussed at section 39 of this report. It does appear that many of the objections to increased traffic on the road do not take into account the fact that the visitor centre site will be served by a new flyover at the Countess roundabout and the A303 will be dualled. It is agreed that if the visitor centre were to go ahead without the parallel highways improvements the junction would struggle to support the projected visitor numbers. However with the flyover and dualling (meaning an end to prolonged queues on the A303 past Stonehenge) the junction is more than adequate to serve the development safely and to the satisfaction of both the County Highways Engineer and the Highways Agency who raise no objections.

Length of Stay

This is an interesting objection. The application if implemented will mean an extension of visitor dwell from the exiting 40 to 60 minutes to about 4 hours. It is not understood why this should be an objection. How visitors choose to spend their leisure time is not a planning issue. The applicants have done extensive research through MORI, which suggests that visitors see an extended visit incorporating state of the art visitor centre and incorporating a walk as highly desirable. If the argument is that the business case will fail this is no different than for granting planning permission for any commercial building and is not a material consideration.

Excessive Cost/Waste of Money

The funding of any new development is outside the remit of the planning authority and this cannot be a material planning consideration.

The Land Train will have an adverse impact on residents in Fargo Road

This is a legitimate and serious issue. The various routes of the land train have been appraised under section 18, page 46. The northern route does run relatively close to the rear gardens of 50-120, Fargo Road (known as the Steel Houses).

From analysis work supplied with the information and especially noise consultants engaged by the council to examine this issue in detail, it has emerged that the noise of the land train will be within acceptable limits and that with suitable mitigation, such as substantial landscape buffering and early conversion to electric power, it can be operated without undue detriment to the residents. If members are minded to approve this application then a condition will be recommended that will secure the ongoing monitoring, reporting and limiting of land train noise to acceptable limits defined by the council.

Impact on Residents adjacent to the new Visitor Centre Site

Inevitably the character of the adjacent land will change. However this should not be taken to mean it would be unacceptable. The Environmental Statement and other documentation has been robustly tested by consultees and your officers and it is concluded that the neighbours will not suffer undue detriment to their living conditions. The comprehensive landscaping scheme and subtle design of the building and car park mean that the manifestation of the new facility will be kept to a minimum. Furthermore should members approve the application, conditions will be recommended limiting opening hours, servicing arrangement, the use and operation of plant and machinery and construction works to safeguard the amenity of neighbours.

Loss of free Visual Access of the Monument from the A303.

The tunnel is not part of this planning application and these objections should have been made at the Inquiry into the roads scheme and not here where they are irrelevant.

Security breach to Local Houses

This is a serious point and the supplementary submission to the application has clarified that the land train route and visitor centre will be gated at night after closing and that security guards will be employed. Also there will be no public right of way introduced to the rear boundaries of the dwellings to the west side of Countess Road and farm gates will remain locked when not in use. Although the fear of crime is understandable, it is considered that with the management measures proposed (which may be conditioned as part of the centre's management plan) that there is no reason to suppose that the development will lead to an increase in crime. The Police have not raised objections to this proposal.

The Land train concept is impracticable and unsustainable.

The question of whether the land train will appeal to visitors is again an issue for the applicants and not a material planning issue. What is pertinent is whether it forms part of a sustainable land use and the impact it may have on the environment.

The concept of reversibility is an important one. If the land train does prove impractical then the track may be taken up and all traces removed without any lasting damage to the environment. This is a key safeguard and also a design philosophy, which is quite common when considering rare heritage resources. With regard to sustainability, the land train is to run on low emission LPG and be switched to electric power as soon technology allows. As soon as the principle of trying to remove inappropriate development out of the World Heritage Site became part of the development plan, it was always the case that any favoured site for replacement visitor facilities would be remote from the Stones themselves. Hence part of the conundrum was how to transport visitors to the stones and back. The idea of a land train run on a fully reversible track and built to run on low emission fuels represents a very good solution. The alternative would be to run buses on the road network, including through the tunnel, which would do little to solve environmental concerns, ease congestion or enhance the visitor experience.

The Project should not be determined until a Decision is made of the A303 Scheme

As discussed at page 4 the application is part of an overall project. However the two parts are inextricably linked. If the flyover at Countess Road does not proceed then there will not be a sufficient standard of infrastructure to support the new development at Countess Road. This in itself does not preclude the granting of permission, but it does mean that if members are minded to approve then there must be a safeguard to ensure that visitor centre access is not from a substandard junction. If members are minded to approve, officers recommend both a condition ensuring that this development does not commence until the works to the Countess Roundabout flyover have, and that the visitor centre cannot open until completion of the flyover.

Conclusions

In summary, on a detailed analysis of all the grounds of objection raised by the community, your officers can find no sustainable reason for refusing this planning application. The objections raised have either been examined and found to be unsustainable through the application process, raise legitimate issues which the applicants have already satisfactorily answered, are legitimate concerns that can be mitigated through the use of conditions or are assertions not underpinned by any empirical evidence.

18. The Views of ICOMOS UK

A number of objectors have made much of the comments of ICOMOS and it is worth spending a little time to consider their position in some detail.

The International Council on Monuments and Sites UK (ICOMOS UK) is recognised by the Government as having special status with regard to World Heritage Sites. With its parent body, ICOMOS, it is official advisor to UNESCO on cultural world heritage sites. Therefore members will understand their status and the reason for some detailed analysis of their concerns. However this must be balanced against the fact that the Government have not made them statutory consultees in the planning system on applications related to scheduled ancient monuments, the primary responsibility for which rests with English Heritage and the County Council.

Lack of access for visitors

ICOMOS -UK consider that the proposal restricts access to the wider WHS and hence does not meet the objective 20 of the Management Plan, which seeks to increase public awareness of the wider area. Your officers do not consider that this represents a sustainable ground for refusing this application and indeed do not concur with the assertion. The application makes it clear that the new visitor centre will facilitate a much wider range of interpretive and educational material into the whole WHS than is currently possible at the existing facilities. With regard to improved access, the public will have free access to walk over all of the English Heritage and National trust land. Similarly cycling and horseriding will be encouraged. The land train will also have interim stops to encourage exploration of Durrington Walls, Woodhenge, the Cursus and Kings Barrow Ridge, which is a great improvement on the very narrow focus of the current visitor experience, based solely on Stonehenge. While it is accepted that the transit system does not cover all of the WHS, it is considered that the access arrangements are a material and significant step in meeting Objective 20 of the Management Plan and will also keep open room for even more improvements in the future.

Competing Visitor Attractions

ICOMOS-UK are concerned that by concentrating all the visitor facilities in a remote location that two rival visitor attractions will be created i.e. the visitor centre will become an attraction in its own right. Officers again feel that this argument is difficult to sustain. Comprehensive market research has been carried out to back up the application and this indicates that it is unequivocally Stonehenge itself, which is viewed as a "must see" attraction in the south of England.

Land Train

ICOMOS considers the land train an unacceptable intrusion into the landscape. They state that the visitor Centre should be located to encourage as many visitors to walk as possible. This raises the question of whether it is better to locate a new visitor centre within the WHS or to accept that some form of transit will be required. Officers consider that the latter, which is routed to minimise impacts, together with the removal of the existing visitor centre and A344, represents a material net improvement to the WHS, which is supported by the Management Plan and Planning Brief as adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance.

Centralised Information and Interpretation

ICOMOS-UK are concerned that having a single point of information may lead to visitors forgetting the information when they get to the Stones. They see a need for satellite information. Officers agree and would point out that interpretative boards already exist in strategic locations throughout the WHS, such as at Cursus, Kings Barrows and Byway 12. It is agreed that these may need to be upgraded.

Need for further facilities on site

ICOMOS-UK state there should be additional visitor facilities within the WHS such as WC's, catering outlets and wet weather shelter. Officers strongly disagree and see this as contradictory to the objection they make about the transit system i.e. the need to minimise new and inappropriate development within the WHS. There will be WC's out of site, in the residual facilities of the existing visitor centre, and there will be shelter at the drop off points. However there is a need to accept that Stonehenge is an outdoors attraction in the UK, with the inherently unpredictable weather. In a similar manner to many of our National Parks there is a need to balance to the proliferation of tourist facilities with the need to declutter and safeguard the intrinsic qualities that make the landscape so attractive in the first place. It is considered that ancillary catering facilities within the WHS would be unacceptable.

Lack of community benefits

ICOMOS-UK also state that they do not consider that the new visitor centre will benefit the local community. Officers again consider this standpoint difficult to justify. It is the case that the current visitor facilities, right next to Stonehenge, only require a quick stop and offer little linkage to surrounding settlements. As national, regional and local planning policy indicates, major developments are best planned in or adjacent to major settlements where they can help sustain their vitality and viability. In line with PPS7, the selected site is the most proximal to Amesbury town centre, which would enable opportunities for local services and businesses to generate income from visitors exploring the area. Additional economic growth would be accrued from additional expenditure on goods and services by English Heritage and other organizations involved in the operation of the visitor centre, the creation of 47.5 full time jobs in the operation of the new visitor centre, up to 275 full time jobs in all including non-direct and induced employment, the equivalent of 38 full time jobs during the construction process, and the increase in average dwell times of the attraction will encourage visitors to make a day of their visit and hence increase the likelihood of a combined visit to Amesbury or Salisbury. It is considered that there are definite and tangible economic benefits that this scheme will deliver; meaning in this respect the application complies with national and regional guidance.

Request for deferral

ICOMOS-UK request that this application be deferred until English Heritage has produced detailed tourism development and operational plans and the outcome of the A303 scheme has been determined. However we are a council faced with a valid and comprehensive planning application and we have an obligation to determine it unless the Secretary of State decides to call it in. There are no grounds for deferral; the information submitted is both comprehensive and credible.

Conclusion on ICOMOS-UK's comments

Because of the status of ICOMOS-UK and the detailed nature of their comments it has been helpful to look at the key issues they have raised. However it is not correct as claimed by some third parties that they are in charge of Stonehenge or that they have some kind of veto. Within the planning process they are a non-statutory consultee.

On detailed analysis of their points your officers do not consider that the request for deferral is a reasonable one. Their points are largely based on management and operational issues related to the tourist elements rather than the planning merits. Members are advised that most of the grounds raised by ICOMOS-UK are not sustainable and furthermore there is, in planning terms, enough material submitted to support the application to facilitate a decision by this authority.