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1. Executive Summary

The Proposal

1.0 Planning permission is sought for the following:

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

Views of Consultees:

- 1.1 Statutory consultees have no objections, providing conditions are used to ensure mitigation measures proposed are implemented and maintained.
- 1.2 The following consultees object to the proposal and recommend refusal: Association of Wessex Tourist Guides, Countess Road Residents Group, CPRE Wiltshire Branch, Amesbury Town Council, Wilsford Cum Lake Parish Council, Bulford Parish Council, Durnford Parish Council, Durrington Parish Council, Salisbury Transport 2000, Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, Association of Council Taxpayers, a local farmer, Trail Riders Fellowship, UK Rivers Network, The Stonehenge Alliance, ICOMOS UK

Views of the Community

1.3 There has been an overwhelming response against the proposal from the local community

Total number of Representations received	851
Objections	760
Support	51
Observations	40

1.4 Comprehensive summaries of the grounds of objection raised are included in Appendix 3 on page 102 to this report

Summary of Local Policy

- 1.5 Planning policies of the Development Plan supports the application. The principle of a new visitor centre on the Countess Site is considered to be supported in principle. Furthermore when the details of the scheme are scrutinised in conjunction with the detailed policy framework it is considered that the planning application is in accordance with the provisions of the Development Plan.
- 1.6 The application is also in accordance with the criteria of the councils Supplementary Planning Guidance contained in the adopted World Heritage Site management Plan, Planning Brief for the Countess East site, County Waste Management, and the emerging Creating Places (District Wide Design Guide).

Summary of Regional, National and International Policy

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

Planning Considerations:

- 1.8 The main planning analysis has centred on the following key issues:
- ## Assessment of Key Planning Issues including: design of the proposals, impact on neighbours, the site selection process, selection process of land train route, landscape Impact Analysis, access strategy, sustainability, tourism, socio-economic considerations
 - ## Evaluation of the Environmental Impact Assessment comprising: archaeology & Historic Environment, landscape character and visual amenity, nature conservation and biodiversity, noise and Vibration, geology and soils, water quality, drainage and hydrology, air quality and emissions, agriculture, socio-economic effects, recreation, cumulative impacts
 - ## Evaluation of the Transportation Assessment comprising: transport policy, relationship with the A303 and closure of the A344, existing and projected transport conditions, sustainability and travel plans, parking provision.
 - ## Appropriate Assessment of Impacts on the River Avon under the Habitat Regulations, including: background and legal framework, the key steps, consultation with English nature, consultation, the sites conservation objectives, request for further information, identifying the effects, the conclusion.
 - ## Timing and Relationship with the A303 Improvements comprising: overview, timing, safeguarding, conclusions and response to the comments of neighbours and third parties

Summary And Conclusions

- 1.9 Without fail in this case, starting from the Development Plan policy framework, through to issues such as impact on the highways network, landscape, archaeology and wildlife issues, there emerges support for approving this application. While the local community have made fair and robust objections, as is their prerogative, on analysis it becomes clear that their arguments cannot be substantiated as planning grounds for refusal.
- 1.10 Members are advised that this planning application is well conceived, in accordance with policy and benefits from some excellent architectural design in the form of the new visitor centre building. Furthermore, while there are areas where adverse impacts will be produced, most notably upon the Cursus, and the loss of high grade agricultural land, it is undoubtedly the case that these impacts are more than compensated for through the net benefits that the application will bring, not least of which is helping to return Stonehenge to a more respectful setting more befitting of its international reputation.

Recommendation - **Approve** subject to:

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

and that providing that English Nature confirm they are satisfied, that members **endorse** the findings of the Appropriate Assessment

2. - Introduction and Objective of Report

- 2.0 This report seeks to determine the full planning application (S/04/0001) for the proposal outlined below, submitted by English Heritage, under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.
- 2.1 The application was submitted to Salisbury District Council on the 25th August 2004 and formally registered on 15th September. It is classified as a major application and as such any decision taken by the council, will be subject to referral to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, for consideration of holding a public inquiry.
- 2.2 It is the objective of this report to set out the facts and the outcome of planning scrutiny of the proposal in order to allow the members of committee to reach an informed decision upon the planning merits of the application. In order to allow this the report will comprise the following components:
- ## Detailed description of the proposals
 - ## A description of the site and its surroundings
 - ## An appraisal of the existing visitor centre facilities
 - ## A summary of relevant site history
 - ## A description of the consultation processes and feedback received
 - ## An analysis of planning issues starting with adopted local plan policy and taking account of all other material considerations
 - ## An evaluation of the Environmental Impact Assessment
 - ## An evaluation of the Transportation Assessment
 - ## An Appropriate Assessment of impacts on the River Avon under the Habitat Regulations
 - ## Response to the comments of neighbours and third parties
 - ## Summing up, conclusions and recommendation.

3. Overview of the Stonehenge Project

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

World Heritage Site Designation

- 3.1 Stonehenge is widely acknowledged to be one of the most important monuments in the World. It has also become an international icon, and attracts visitors from all over the world.
- 3.2 Stonehenge along with Avebury and its associated sites were inscribed as a single cultural World Heritage Site under the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) World Heritage Convention in 1986. This designation places an international obligation on the host nation under the World Heritage Convention for the careful protection and management of the site, to prevent damage to the archaeology and its setting and to ensure its survival for future generations.

Drivers for Change

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

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

- 3.5 The response of the Government and its agencies, especially English Heritage who have responsibility for the management of Stonehenge, was to put in place a long term strategy with the imperatives of trying to return the monument to a more respectful setting commensurate with its international reputation, to safeguard its long-term future and to improve the quality of the visitor experience based upon a more meaningful visit informed by a greater understanding of the wider landscape.
- 3.6 The overarching objectives are contained in the Stonehenge World Heritage Site Management Plan. This document was drafted only after comprehensive consultation and many meetings of a working party known as the World Heritage Site Management Group consisting of a wide range of stakeholders; including national and local organisations, landowners and local residents. Salisbury District Council was a member of this Management Group. This document represents a consensual approach to identifying objectives for improving and managing the long-term conservation and enhancement of the World Heritage Site. In brief the key aims of the management Plan are:
- ## Secure the management of the World Heritage Site landscape so that its outstanding value is conserved and where possible enhanced
 - ## Increase public understanding and interest of the World Heritage Site
 - ## To strive for a sustainable approach to the future management of the World Heritage Site which balances archaeology, nature conservation, visitor access and agriculture
 - ## To maximise the economic and cultural benefits of the World Heritage Site to the local communities without compromising the archaeological value of the site
 - ## To map out a prioritised and achievable programme of action.
- 3.7 The Management Plan has been adopted by Salisbury District Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance to the adopted Local Plan and hence carries significant weight as a material consideration when considering the application before committee.

Delivering Key Objectives of the Management Plan - The Stonehenge Project

- 3.8 In very basic terms the application we are currently considering is a direct response to the drivers and strategy adopted above.
- 3.9 English Heritage working with key partners; the Highways Agency and National Trust under the guiding government offices, identified some key opportunities for trying to meet one of the core objectives of the Management Plan which is to seek to remove inappropriate 20th Century development from the setting of the monument and to return it to a more respectful chalk downland setting. To realise this objective a 'Stonehenge Vision' emerged which outlined the following:

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

3.10 These objectives are being pursued in three main ways:

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

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

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

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

Conclusions

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

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

4. Description of the Site and Its Surroundings

The Countess East Site - Proposed location of the Visitor Centre

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

This upgrading includes provision of a flyover at Countess Roundabout. The A303 provides one of the main connections from London to the West Country.

- 4.1 The site is often described as the “teardrop site” because of its shape. It comprises approximately 28 hectares (70 acres) and is currently under agricultural use (grades 3 & 4).
- 4.2 The site is bounded to the east by the River Avon, which is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The A303 forms the southern boundary except the southwest corner, which is a Granada roadside service area (a Little Chef, a Travel Lodge and a Shell petrol station). Residential ribbon development along the A345 Countess Road forms the western boundary and the northern tip is a woodland area.
- 4.3 The northern half of the site slopes down towards the River Avon. This gradient and planning constraints - most notably an odour constraint caused by the nearby sewage plant - limit its suitability for development. The area along the A303 is flat and provides the best vehicular access onto the site from the A303 with site egress being provided via a left only turn onto Countess Road. It is therefore likely that the building and associated car and coach parking will be located in the southern area of the teardrop site and carefully screened from the residential ribbon development along the Countess Road.

The character of the Stonehenge World Heritage Site

- 4.4 The World Heritage Site is characterised by predominantly open, rolling agricultural land, with fields bounded by hedges. Small plantations and coppices punctuate the area, but the largely open aspect means there are good views into the distance, often to the ridge lines of gentle escarpments. The area is scattered with a great number of visible archaeological features such as barrows, ditches and of course the megalithic stone circle of Stonehenge itself. The largely open aspect does provide a high level of intervisibility between these archaeological features.
- 4.5 The World Heritage Site should not be considered a homogenous landscape, but is rather characterised by a number of distinct character zones. For example the area around the Stonehenge monument is often referred to as a bowl or amphitheatre, and is distinguished by high number of intervisible barrows in an open setting, framed by distant views to higher ground of surrounding ridgelines and plantations. There is a further distinct character area to the eastern area of the World Heritage Site of the River Avon Valley, which meanders through often heavily wooded floodplains.
- 4.6 To the east of the Stonehenge amphitheatre lies King Barrows Ridge, which is occupied by a high number of burial mounds, many of which are now enclosed in a mature tree belt. This ridge performs an important function in dividing the eastern portion of the World Heritage Site, visually into two, as you cannot acquire views past it from Stonehenge. The land between King Barrows Ridge and the Visitor Centre site comprises of predominantly open agricultural land utilised for both arable and livestock. It is a gently undulating chalk downland landscape punctuated by hedgerows, dry valleys and coppices.

5. Appraisal of the existing Visitor Facilities.

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

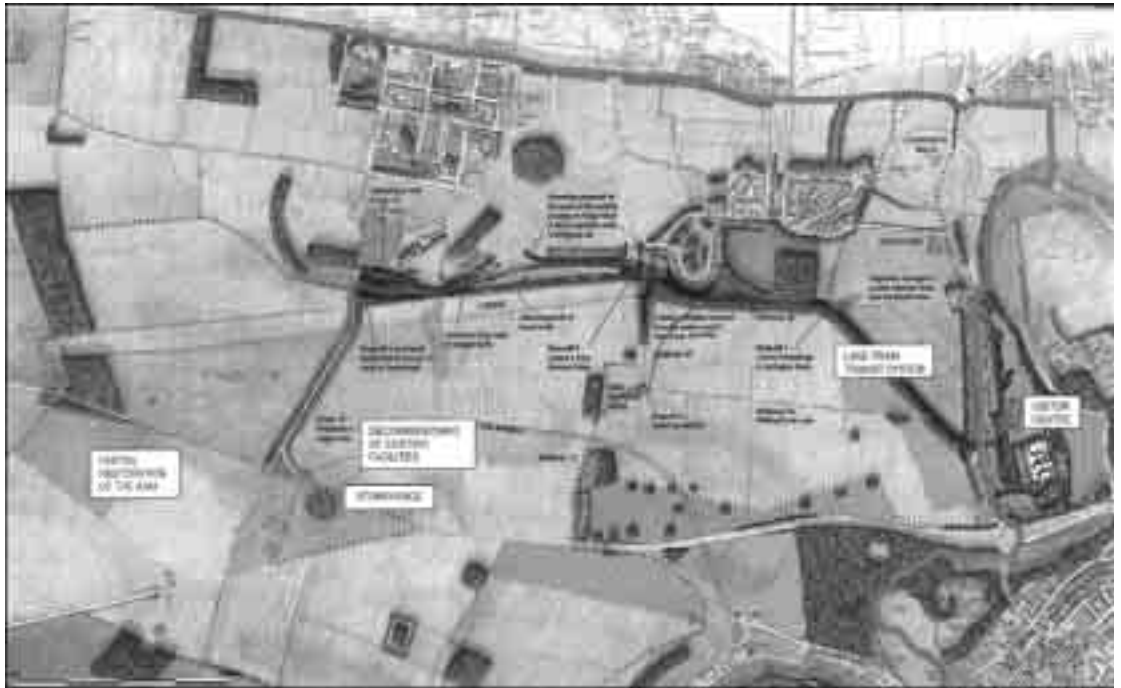
- 5.1 The existing facilities comprise a large at grade, metalled car park accessed off of the A344 adjacent to Stonehenge. Access to the monument is via a ramp and steps to a partially underground visitor centre which contains a café (no internal seating) a shop and ticket booth, English Heritage promotions hut, management offices, an area for collection of information wands and WC's. Visitors walk under the A344 via an underpass and emerge next to the monument. The buildings are a mixture of concrete, timber and portable style and have no overall architectural coherence or merit. It appears as if the centre has grown in a piecemeal fashion over the years giving a disjointed and awkward relationship between the building and its setting. The at grade car park is prominent in the landscape and can be seen as a backdrop to the monument from several key distant views such as from King Barrows Ridge to the east.
- 5.2 During the summer an overspill car park, enclosed by a wooden post and rail fence, occupies grassed areas to the north of the metalled car park.
- 5.3 Without prejudice to this application, in design terms the existing facilities are of a very poor quality indeed. It lacks any discernable underpinning design concept other than pure functionality. The palettes of materials and surface treatments do nothing to unite the buildings or lift the overall impression of crude, concrete 1960's brutalism.
- 5.4 The impact of the centre of the existing facilities on the monument is quite shockingly detrimental. One of the most important and famous structures known to mankind is right next to a very poor quality collection of buildings and a car park with no redeeming architectural merit whatsoever.

6. Summary of Relevant Site History

- 6.0 There is a comprehensive list of all the planning histories included at Appendix I to this report. This details the many planning applications that have been made in relation to the application site. The majority are not relevant to this application. The application of most interest is detailed below.
- 6.1 Application reference 91/0700 - Outline application for the erection of visitor centre facilities, car park, access road, removal of existing visitor facilities and appropriate reinstatement on land at Larkhill. This application was refused on the following grounds:
- ⌘ Detrimental to the character of the Special Landscape Area.
 - ⌘ The access route is unacceptable because of the impact upon the Cursus

7. Description of the Proposals

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



7.1

Figure 1 - Master Plan

Visitor Centre Building - External Design

- 7.2 The new Visitor Centre is proposed to be located outside the World Heritage Site on farmland located to the east of Countess Road. The size of the site is approximately 280,000m² (28 ha) and its boundaries are as identified in the 1999 Planning Brief. The site is north of Amesbury Town Centre and lies some 3.3km to the east of Stonehenge
- 7.3 The floor space of the proposed new Visitor Centre is approximately 6147sq.m (0.5 ha). The building is designed as a low, single level structure of abstract form, which sits embedded in the gentle upper slope of the river valley landscape. The building represents a low key structure, the principle public face of which is a simple, long, sweeping front wall, some 4.7 metres high, clad in steel, with a single gap in it which is the main entrance. This wall is twisted in places so that it catches the sunlight in different ways.



Figure 2 - Front Elevation of new Visitor Centre

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

Visitor centre - internal Layout

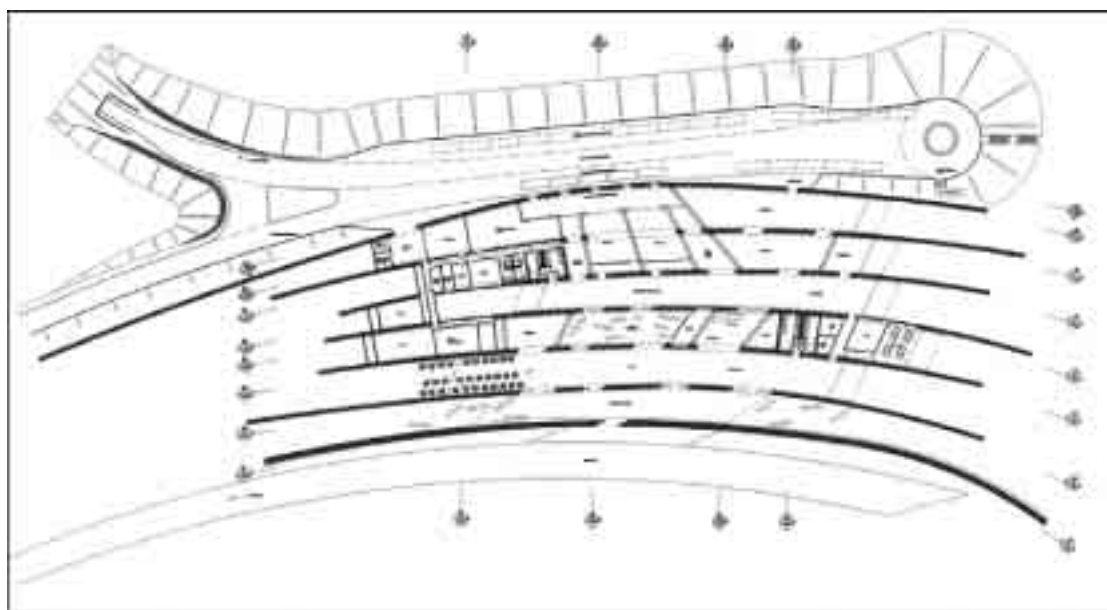


Figure 3 - Visitor Centre Floor Plan

- 7.5 The application states that the Visitor Centre will contain 'high quality' interpretation facilities including exhibition spaces and theatres; an orientation and ticketing area; research and corporate/community/educational facilities; general visitor facilities including first aid/toilets; ancillary retail and catering; administrative and operations accommodation; integral transit station; and tourist information plus English Heritage and National Trust membership areas. The building is designed to have a capacity of some 1500 visitors at any one time (projected maximum numbers at peak time are 1100)
- 7.6 Behind the main entrance and front wall, there is a covered entrance area with some seating. This leads through to an orientation area, which will offer basic information to visitors about the facilities on offer and options for their visit. This area will include directional signage to the main facilities such as ticketing desks, toilets, café, and meeting points as well as providing direct access of dedicated rooms/lecture theatres for school/academic use (capacity of 30 pupils). Both the shop and café would be accessible from the orientation area without the need to purchase a ticket. The café is proposed to be of the self-service type with a main seating area for 150 people. Extra seating will be provided on very busy days.
- 7.7 From the orientation area the visitor would pass through the ticketing via one of three ticketing desks into an exhibition and interpretation area. The three main exhibition areas would hold up to 260 visitors and it is envisaged that they would spend some 30 minutes in this area. The content of the exhibitions is yet to be decided (and this is largely an operational decision not one for the planning authority) but seem sure to be based around archaeological finds, inter-active displays and multi-media presentations aimed at fostering an understanding of the monument and its relationship with the wider World Heritage Site, as well as theories regarding how and why it was constructed.
- 7.8 In conjunction with the exhibitions, two audio-visual theatres are planned to provide short presentations. These would have an hourly capacity of approximately 1200 visitors, more than enough to cope with projected visitor numbers.
- 7.9 To the rear of the building will be the embarkment and disembarkment area for the land train trip to the World Heritage Site. This area has a capacity in excess of 140 visitors and will have automatic doors aligned to those of the train, synchronised in a similar way to the modern London Underground stations.

- 7.10 The building has been designed to be sustainable and low energy through the incorporation of solar orientation via south facing windows, low profile façade to minimise heat loss, glazing located to maximise natural daylight and ventilation, and a grass roof to minimise heat loss. More detailed measures include energy efficient lighting, water consumption, heating cooling, and electricity consumption. A detailed analysis of the sustainable credentials of the project is included in the planning analysis section of this report at page 20.

Access, Parking and Egress at the Visitor Centre



Figure 4 - Countess Road East Site Layout Plan

- 7.11 Cars and coaches would enter from the eastbound lane of the A303, sharing the slip road to the existing service area. From this slip road the vehicles would follow a narrow one-way road that runs through a meadow setting enclosed by trees. Coaches would be directed left and travel through a planned open wooded landscape to a stopping point where passengers would be dropped off before the empty coach progresses to the coach parking area to the south of the site. Cars would continue on the entrance road, which is designed to give them a brief glimpse of the visitor centre through the break in the trees, an attempt to produce a sense of arrival and excitement in the visitor. Conscious effort has been made to make the entrance experience one of travelling through a country lane.
- 7.12 In contrast to the rural feel and curving lines of the approach road, the car park is designed on rigid geometric lines comprising four rectangular compounds. The design incorporates landscaped bunds to effectively screen the car park from neighbouring residents and views into the site. The parking area itself is proposed to be a bound aggregate surface to the access roads and sprayed bitumen to the car park, which will be interspersed with clumps of trees to soften its impact. The design philosophy of this component is that while landscaping will be used to make it a pleasant experience, there is no point trying to disguise the fact that it is a car park and that the distinction between early 21st century man made landscape is deliberately to contrast with the natural landscape of the World Heritage Area one is about to enter.

7.13 The visitor centre would include the following provision

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

7.14 Vehicular egress from the site is via a dedicated exit road to the east boundary of the site, out onto Countess Road. This egress is some 65 metres north of that serving the Countess Services and some 150 metres north of the Countess Roundabout. This egress shows both exiting vehicles to be able to turn left or right and this will be discussed in detail under the planning considerations section of this report at section 39, page 67



7.15 Figure 5 - Proposed Car and Coach Park

Access to the World Heritage Site - Transit System

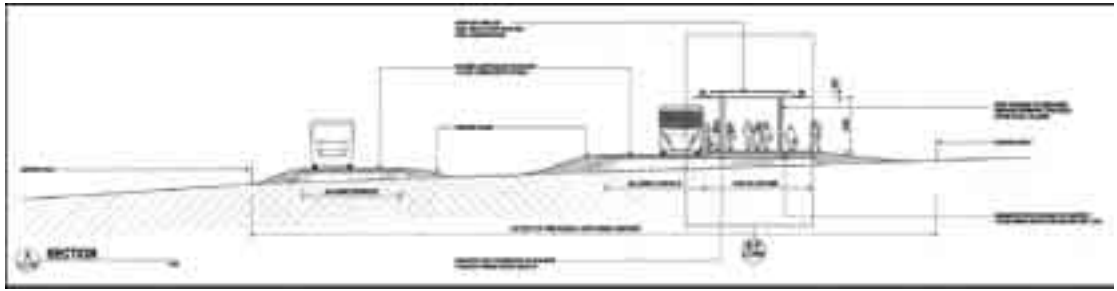
- 7.16 A land train transit system is proposed to move visitors from the new visitor centre, under Countess Road via a tunnel and to a choice of drop off points within the World Heritage Site.
- 7.17 It is proposed that the land trains would depart from the visitor centre via a tunnel under Countess Road and then take a route across the north eastern part of the World Heritage Site adjacent to the route of the existing Bridleway 37, which occupies the route of a disused military railway (known locally as the Apple Track). At the point where this track bends from a north westerly direction to westerly is a proposed interim drop off point (referred to as Drop Off I) which will allow visitors to explore (via existing public footpaths) Woodhenge, Durrington Walls and the remainder of the north east area of the World Heritage Site.
- 7.18 From Drop Off I, the land train continues in a westerly direction adjacent to Bridleway 30, the land train route splits at a junction just to the south of the residential development known as Strangways. Initially the land train will head south at this point broadly following the alignment of

Bridleway 12 to Drop Off 2 which is to the east of King Barrows Ridge. The drop off point here is served by a shelter, which is described below and is sited on formerly developed land occupied by Seven Barrow Cottages (no longer standing). This drop off point cannot be viewed from Stonehenge as it is to the east of King Barrows Ridgeline. It is only when visitors walk to Byway 10 that they see the Stonehenge amphitheatre and the monument itself. This Drop Off gives visitors the option either to view the Stones from a distance and then return to the Visitor Centre, re-board a land train to gain closer access to the stones, or walk to the stones along the ancient processional route of the Avenue. The walk from this drop off point is fairly challenging as one must descend and ascend a fairly steep dry valley and the walk covers some 1.65km (@1 Mile). It would take about 25 minutes.

- 7.19 After Drop Off Point 2 the train would return north, parallel to Bridleway 39 to Strangways where it would branch to the east and follow a route just to the north of the easterly most extent of the large archaeological, oval ditch system known as the Cursus. Here is Drop Off point 3 which allows good views of Stonehenge Monument and amphitheatre.
- 7.20 Finally the land train will run east, to the north of the Cursus and south of the residential properties of 50-120, Fargo Road (known as the Steel Houses) to a drop off point at Durrington Farm. This is the final drop off point and is north of Stonehenge at the head of By Way 12. Here it is proposed there will be a second shelter (the other is at Kings Barrows) and visitors will be able to take a fairly easy, level walk, emerging from an existing wooded area, south along Byway 12 to Stonehenge. Due to topography and existing mature landscaping, this drop off point is not visible from Stonehenge Monument itself.
- 7.21 It is envisaged that the majority of visitors will take this latter option as it leaves the easiest access to the stones as well as providing access for the mobility impaired by allowing for wheelchair use. Motorised wheelchairs will be provided at this drop off point (they will be stored in the visitor centre and taken out everyday).
- 7.22 Visitors could then return to the visitor centre on foot or by re-boarding the land train at either Drop Off 2 or 4.

Design of the Land Train and surface

- 7.23 The application proposes that the actual land train will not be commissioned until planning permission is granted. However in order to allow an environmental assessment of its potential impacts the applicants have described certain specifications, which are as follows:
 - ⌘ A land train of four carriages, one of which houses the power unit
 - ⌘ The carriages would be fully enclosed
 - ⌘ The land train would run on rubber tyres
 - ⌘ They would be powered by low-emission LPG
 - ⌘ They would be upgraded to electric fuel cell propulsion as soon as technology allows
 - ⌘ Each train would have a capacity of 150 passengers
 - ⌘ Each train would have space for two wheelchair users
 - ⌘ At peak times a land train would depart the visitor centre at every 10 minutes
 - ⌘ 5 land trains in total would be required
 - ⌘ They would be stored and serviced in an area to the rear of the Visitor Centre.
 - ⌘ They would have a maximum speed of 15 kph.
- 7.24 Indicative illustrations of potential land trains have been submitted with the application.



7.25

Figure 6 - Indicative drawings of landtrains at drop off point

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

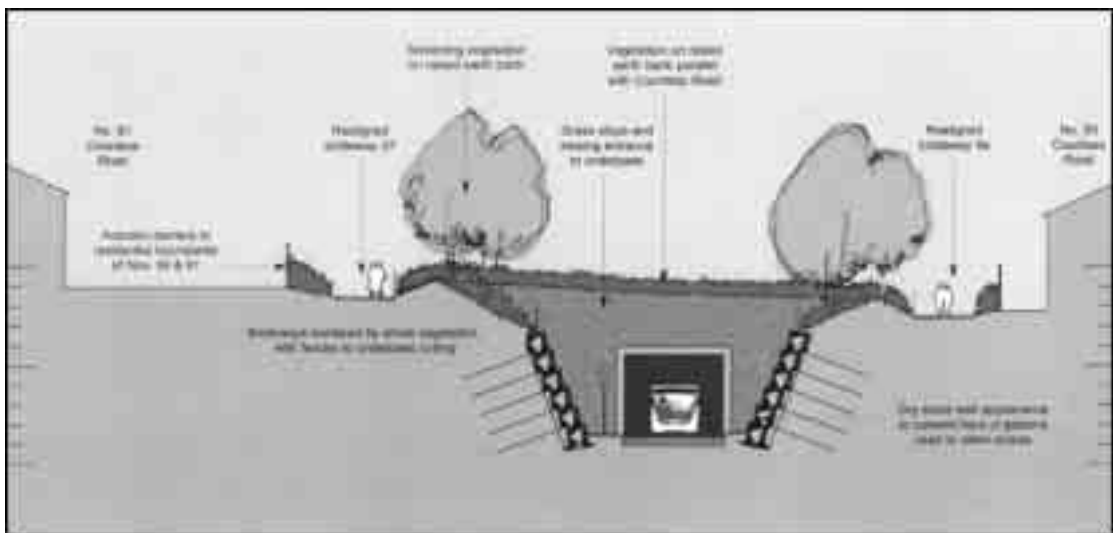


Figure 7 - Cross section of land train tunnel under Countess Road

Access To The Stones

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

Adaptation Of Existing Facilities

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



Figure 8 - Existing Car Park

Decommissioning and Remodelling of the A344

- 7.29 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

- 7.30 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.
- 7.31 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:

- 7.32 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.
- 7.33 The 132kv national grid power line which currently crosses the site do 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

- 7.34 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.

8. Description of the Consultation and Publicity Measures Employed

- 8.0 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, Phase 1 - On receipt of the planning application

Statutory Consultees

- 8.1 Formal consultation to all of the 105 consultees identified in Appendix I.
- 8.2 In advance of the formal consultation the following scoping work was carried out: all of the consultees in Appendix I were written to, giving them prior notice of the application asking how they would like to be consulted and giving them the following options:
- ✘ Letter only and view the details of the plans on our dedicated WebPages
 - ✘ Letter and CDR of Executive Summary
 - ✘ Letter and hard copy Executive Summaries
 - ✘ Letter and full application on CDR
 - ✘ Letter and full copy of paper application
 - ✘ Tailored delivery e.g. Transportation Assessment for Highways Authority, ES for English Nature etc. We asked them to specify what parts they initially wanted and identified the likely make-up of the application.
- 8.3 From the responses a database of how each wanted to be consulted when the planning application arrived was compiled. We then liaised with the applicants prior to submission so that they know how many copies of the application we required in each format.

Councillors

- 8.4 All elected members of Salisbury District Councillors were notified by letter of the application and supplied with a hard copy of the Executive Summary and referred to the dedicated WebPages. An additional full copy of the planning application was placed in the Members room. Full electronic and hard copies of the whole application were made available on request.

Neighbours

- 8.5 A covering letter, a 'Question and Answer' leaflet drafted by the Council, giving basic facts and where more information can be obtained plus a response form was sent to in excess of the 11,479 households in the Northern Committee Area.

Other Publicity measures

- 8.6 In order to try and ensure wide scale public engagement, the following publicity measures were also carried out:
- ⌘ A week long 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 and through a press release.
 - ⌘ A press launch was held on receipt of the application, including an introduction from the Leader of the Council, overview from the Chief Executive and technical summary by the Case Officer. Invites were extended to local and national press.
 - ⌘ Press releases were issued at key milestones such as registration, and then mid-way through the consultation process to remind people they still had a chance to have their say
 - ⌘ 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 news papers.
 - ⌘ An article outlining the proposals and peoples right to comment was placed in the council newspaper: The Citizen, a copy of which is sent to every household in the district.

Parish Councils

- 8.7 All Parish Councils in the Northern Committee Area were sent a letter and hard copy of the Executive Summary, plus the Question and Answer leaflet.

Dedicated WebPages

- 8.8 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

- 8.9 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. The consultation period commenced on the 15th September and closed on the 27th October

Late Submissions

- 8.10 Although the formal deadline for comments closed on the 27th October we accept that some people may have been working abroad or indisposed. We have therefore accepted comments right up to the closing date for this committee report, which is the 11th July 2005.

Consultation and Publicity, Phase 2 - On receipt of Supplementary Information

- 8.11 Under the Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999 (SI No. 293), the council is entitled to request further information that is necessary to complete the Environmental Statement and allow proper

consideration of the likely environmental effects of the proposed development. Also there were a myriad of questions emerging from the consultation process and our own analysis of the plans, which raised legitimate planning concerns and required an answer from the applicants. This required a further period of consultation to give stakeholders the opportunity to comment on the additional information available.

Consultees

- 8.12 All of the consultees outlined in Phase 1 above, were reconsulted and provided with a covering letter and a full copy of the supplementary submission on CD Rom. Paper copies were made available on request.

Neighbours Letters

- 8.13 A standard neighbour notification letter was sent to neighbours. All 11,479 were not re-notified directly; instead a more targeted approach was used comprising a discretionary identification of those neighbours considered to be impacted by the proposals and those who had submitted comments (along with contact details) during the first phase. A liberal interpretation was taken of those likely to be directly affected and in total some 1,081 letters were sent out.

Other Publicity Measures

- 8.14 A day long exhibition in Amesbury Library staffed by the Case Officer and supported by display boards. This event was advertised in advance in the local press and through a press release.
- 8.15 A press release was made on receipt of the supplementary submission and media interviews were given including local radio.
- 8.16 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.
- 8.17 Quarter page press advertisements were placed in prominent locations within the local news papers.

Elected Members

- 8.18 All elected members to be re-consulted by letter and were provided with an electronic copy of the supplementary information on CD Rom. Hard copies were made available on request and placed in the Members Room.

Parish Councils

- 8.19 All the parish councils as originally consulted were re-consulted and provided with a full electronic version of the supplementary information on CD Rom. Paper copies were made available on request.

Website

- 8.20 The supplementary information was placed on a new page within the existing Stonehenge pages and people could both view the information and submit comments online. The resubmission was advertised clearly on the Salisbury District Council homepage with links through to the information. Again people could request copies of the information online.

9. The Response of Consultees

- 9.0 Out of the 105 consultees consulted (including Parish Councils) representations were received from 73 organisations.
- 9.1 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 report represents a summary of the main issues to emerge
- 9.2 The following represents a very broad summary to inform members of the position of consultees. Some consultees have expressed the desire to either support or object to the proposals while still asking for further clarification and hence they may therefore appear in more than one list.

Phase 1 - Response to the original submission.

Recommendations for Refusal:

- 9.3 Association of Wessex Tourist Guides. Grounds: Members will lose livelihood due to changing nature and pattern of visits.
- 9.4 Countess Road Residents Group: Grounds: Location, disruption and access.
- 9.5 CPRE Wiltshire Branch: Grounds: the access proposals would be unacceptably damaging to the World Heritage Site and local amenity and contrary to planning policy and management plan objectives.
- 9.6 Amesbury Town Council: Grounds: 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.
- 9.7 Wilsford Cum Lake Parish Council: Grounds: Increased traffic congestion on Countess Road and Countess Roundabout. The Visitor Centre will be too far from the stones.
- 9.8 Bulford Parish Council: Grounds: 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.
- 9.9 Durnford Parish Council: Grounds: New centre would be too far from the Stones.
- 9.10 Durrington Parish Council: Grounds: 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.
- 9.11 Salisbury Transport 2000: Grounds: 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.

- 9.12 Wiltshire Archaeological & Natural History Society: Grounds: 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.
- 9.13 Wiltshire Wildlife Trust: Grounds: A holding objection pending further information related to the building design, energy efficiency, water usage, management of surrounding grounds and visitor centre interpretation.
- 9.14 The Stonehenge Alliance Grounds: 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 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.
- 9.15 Association of Council Taxpayers Grounds: to 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 Countess Road residents, noise, pollution, demolition of houses, fly parking in the Woodford Valley, viable alternatives must be examined in depth.
- 9.16 Local Farmer (through agent) Grounds: 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 and structures such as handling facilities for livestock, local transport network will be worsened, Fargo North is more suited site.
- 9.17 Trail Riders Fellowship: Grounds: lack of care by EH on rights of way, Byway 12 is a strategic route for byway users and placing restrictions is 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.
- 9.18 UK Rivers Network: Lack of appropriate assessment, lack of consultation on appropriate assessment, lack of a strategic environmental assessment, failure to consider alternatives.

Support proposals as submitted:

- 9.19 British Archaeology Magazine, South West of England Regional Development Agency (SWRDA), South West Tourism.

Support Approval subject to further information:

- 9.20 Council for British Archaeology, English Heritage (Curatorial), Hampshire Cycling, National Trust, International Institute of Peace Studies and Global Philosophy.

No objections:

- 9.21 DEFRA, Defence Estates (Safeguarding Boscombe Down), Highways Agency, Health and Safety Executive, RSPB.

Requests for Additional Information to clarify the application and environmental impacts:

- 9.22 Council for British Archaeology, ICOMOS, National Trust, Wessexplore, English Nature, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, Salisbury District Council Environmental Health, Salisbury District Council Arboriculture Officer, Wessex Water, Wiltshire Fire Brigade, Association of Wessex Tourist Guides, Salisbury Tourism Partnership, Highways Agency, Berengaria Order of Druids, English Heritage (curatorial), Environment Agency, Wiltshire County Council Archaeology, Wiltshire County Council Highways, Wiltshire County Council Public Rights of Way, Wiltshire County Council Planning, Hampshire Cycling, Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society, The Amesbury Society, Salisbury Transport 2000, Campaign to Protect Rural England, Council of British Druid Orders and Stonehenge Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Country Land and Business Association, South West Tourism, The Prehistoric Society, The Royal Astronomical Society, Wiltshire Bridleways Association, CABE.

No comments to make:

- 9.23 The Countryside Agency, Garden History Society, Forestry Commission, Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings.

Position of Wiltshire County Council:

- 9.24 Representatives of the County attended the first Consultative Technical Group (CTG) on the 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.

Consultees who did not Reply

- 9.25 Coach Drivers Club GB, Council for British Druid Orders, Europae Archaeologiae Consilium, Heritage Lottery Fund, Larkhill Residents Group, MOD Defence Estates – local, MOD - Defence Estates - Westdown Camp Tilshead, MOD - Headquarters Larkhill Garrison, National Farmers Union, Parish Council – Allington, Parish Council - Berwick St James, Parish Council – Cholderton, Parish Council – Figheledean, Parish Council – Firsdown, Parish Council - Great Wishford, Parish Council – Idmiston, Parish Council – Milston, Parish Council - Newton Tony, Parish Council – Orcheston, Parish Council – Shrewton, Parish Council - South Newton, Parish Council – Stapleford, Parish Council - Steeple Langford, Parish Council – Tilshead, Parish Council – Winterbourne, Parish Council - Winterbourne Stoke, Parish Council – Woodford, Ramblers Association, Robert Key MP, Salisbury District Council - Community Initiatives, Wiltshire County Council Waste Services, UNESCO - The World Heritage Centre.

Phase 2 - response to second round of consultation on the Supplementary submission

New recommendations and/or additional grounds for Refusal:

- 9.26 Amesbury Society Grounds: 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,
- 9.27 The Stonehenge Alliance Additional Grounds: 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 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.
- 9.28 Countess Road Residents Group Additional grounds: 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 applicants Supplementary submission then follows which is too long to include here, but generally strongly challenges the assertions contained therein.
- 9.29 Association of Council Taxpayers Additional grounds: 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, 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.
- 9.30 ICOMOS UK Grounds: 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.
- 9.31 CPRE Wiltshire Branch Grounds: 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 of shelters within the WHS, access for the disabled.
- 9.32 Durrington Parish Council Grounds: 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.

- 9.33 Amesbury Town Council Grounds: 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 bused 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.

Reiteration of initial objections

- 9.34 County Archaeologist, Wiltshire Heritage (Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society), Salisbury Transport 2000, Trail Riders Fellowship,

Reiteration of support

- 9.35 SWRDA, CBA (Council for British Archaeology),

No objections subject to conditions:

- 9.36 National Trust, Wiltshire County Council, Environment Agency, SDC Environmental Health, SDC Arboricultural Officer, Wessex Water,

No objections:

- 9.37 English Heritage (curatorial), National Grid,

Express Observations without clear objection or support:

- 9.38 Bengaria Order of Druids

Requests for Additional Information to clarify the application and environmental impacts:

- 9.39 Fire Officer

No further comments to make:

- 9.40 Wessex Water, The Countryside Agency, CABI, Health and Safety Executive,

Position of Wiltshire County Council:

- 9.41 Confirms 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:

- 9.42 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 will then consider whether or not their objection can be withdrawn.

10. The Response of Neighbours and Third Parties

- 10.0 The scope of the consultation process undertaken to attempt to engage the public and interested parties is described at section 8, page 16 of this report.
- 10.1 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.

Phase I - Response to the original submission.

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

Stonehenge Community Engagement - Summary of Response	
Number of Notification Letters sent	11,479
Total number of Representations received	795*
Objections	707
Support	49
Observations	39

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

Table 1 - Summary of Neighbour Notification and Publicity Response on Original submission

- 10.3 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. 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 is included as Appendix 3 of this report (page 102). The community responses often contained more than 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.

- 10.4 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 102 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.
- 10.5 The Council also received several objections raised by only one person, again these appear in full in the table in Appendix 3 at page 102. 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.
- 10.6 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 102

Summary of Principle Grounds for Support

- 10.7 In general people did not tend to give a reason for their support of the project, and of the 49 who expressed support, 32 did not give the reason why. The remaining 17 cited the following reasons:
- 10.8 **Landscape of the WHS:** 4 people supported the project because it intended to return the monument to its natural landscape.
- 10.9 **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.
- 10.10 **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.
- 10.11 **Other reasons given for support** ranged from the long-term benefits to wildlife, to support for ensuring increased Tourism in the local area.

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

Summary of Observations

- 10.13 39 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.

Phase 2 - Response to the supplementary information.

- 10.14 Table 2 below summarises the gross numbers of responses and the breakdown between objection, support or observations.

10.15

10.16

Stonehenge Community Engagement - Summary of Response	
Number of Notification Letters sent	829
Total number of Representations received	56
Objections	53
Support	2
Observations	1

Table 2 - Summary of Neighbour Notification and Publicity Response on Supplementary

- 10.17 It can be seen that the second round of public consultation solicited far fewer replies than the first, however they are none the less important for that. It is in large part due to the original comments still standing and many expressed views that they did not need to add to them. The grounds of objections were ostensibly the same as those raised under round one and they are all included in Appendix 3 on page 102

11. 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?

- 11.0 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.
- 11.1 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.
- 11.2 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

- 11.3 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

- 11.4 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 (2001)

- DPI (Priorities for Sustainable Development)
- DP2 (Infrastructure)
- T2 (Public Passenger Transport)
- T4 (Cycling and Walking)
- T5 (Parking)
- T7 (Transport Provision for New Developments)
- T11 (A303 Stonehenge Transport improvements including Flyover at Countess Roundabout)
- CI (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)

11.5 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)
- 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)
- T1 (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.

- 11.6 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.
- 11.7 First we must analyse whether the planning application is in accordance with the explicit principals of the local plan or whether policies dictate whether 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 Principal of Development

- 11.8 Key policy considerations are expressed in policies C2 and T3 of the Salisbury Local Plan (2003) and policy C12 of the Wiltshire Structure Plan.
- 11.9 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.

- 11.10 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.
- 11.11 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.
- 11.12 With regard to the first; realising benefits to the local economy, Section 24 of this reports at page 53, 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 meaning. In this respect the application complies with policy C2

- 11.13 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.
- 11.14 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.
- 11.15 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.
- 11.16 The exceptional need for the new visitor centre being 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 17, page 44 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.
- 11.17 The unique and exceptional circumstances related to the case, 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

- 11.18 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 14 page 31 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

- 11.19 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 15 page 39 onwards, for a detailed appraisal of the general principles of the development

Design

Salisbury Local Plan, policies D1, D7

- 11.20 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 14 page 39 for a detailed analysis of design.

Conservation

Wiltshire Structure Plan, policies, HE1, HE5, HE7

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

- 11.21 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 27 on page 55.

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

- 11.22 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 49

Transportation

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

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

- 11.23 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 67

Tourism

Wiltshire Structure Plan, policies RLT1, RLT2, RLT8

Salisbury Local Plan, policies, T1, T2, T3

- 11.24 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 23

- 11.25

Waste and Recycling

Wiltshire Structure Plan, policies W1, W2

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

- 11.26 These policies seek to ensure waste is managed in a manner that seeks to protect the environment for current and future generations. Scrutiny of this application against these criteria are at part 22, page 51 of this report.

The Development Plan - Conclusions

- 11.27 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 15 of this report below. Further more 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.
- 11.28 Therefore while the principal of development is in accordance with the development plan, this means that it has only cleared the first hurdle.

12. Supplementary Planning Guidance

- 12.0 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

- 12.1 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.
- 12.2 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, tunnelling of the A303 and closure of the A344.
- 12.3 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 Sites significance.

- 12.4 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

- 12.5 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

- 12.6 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 mean 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.

12.7 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 8 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

- 12.8 This was adopted by Salisbury District Council as SPG to the Local Plan on the 27th October 1999.
- 12.9 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.
- 12.10 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.

12.11 This SPG does not write a blank cheque for development to progress at the Countess Road site, rather it introduces a presumption that the principal 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 10 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 15, which follows and contains a detailed analysis of the planning issues of the case.

Supplementary Planning Guidance for Waste Audits

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

12.13 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.

12.14 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 (Consultation Draft)

12.15 An emerging district-wide design guide, which is undergoing consultation as this report is written.

12.16 This SPG is currently undergoing public consultation with a view to adoption in September. As such it carries significantly less weight as a material consideration to this planning application than the fully adopted documents mentioned above. Nevertheless it does gain some weight as it moves through the process and its provisions should be considered material to this application.

12.17 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.

12.18 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.

13. National and Regional Planning Policy

13.0 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).

13.1 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.

13.2 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

13.3 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).

13.4 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?

- 13.5 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.
- 13.6 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
- 13.7 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.
- 13.8 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.
- 13.9 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 lay out of the facilities are of an extremely high quality and subtle design, which seeks to keep their impact minimal.

Conclusions

- 13.10 The planning application is considered, in principle, to comply with national and regional planning guidance. It's design and siting is 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.

14. International Guidance

The Convention

- 14.0 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

- 14.1 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

- 14.2 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.

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

- 15.0 At both a national and 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).
- 15.1 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.

- 15.2 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 CABE documentation. These are included in Appendix 4 of this report.

The Site Layout

- 15.3 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 lay out 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.
- 15.4 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

- 15.5 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.
- 15.6 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.
- 15.7 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.
- 15.8 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

- 15.9 Both CABE 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.

- 15.10 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 visitors 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.
- 15.11 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 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

- 15.12 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.
- 15.13 The most important appraisal of this element of the scheme is its impact on the landscape and archaeology which follow in pages 49 and 55 and this section will also cover the design issues.

The Adapted Existing Visitor Centre

- 15.14 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, WC's and emergency first aid.
- 15.15 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.
- 15.16 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

- 15.17 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.

16. The Views of Neighbouring Residents

- 16.0 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

- 16.1 This is the most common objection and its motivation 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.
- 16.2 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 into 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

- 16.3 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 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

- 16.4 This is an interesting objection. The application if implemented will mean an extension of visitor dwell from the existing 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

- 16.5 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

- 16.6 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).
- 16.7 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

- 16.8 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.

- 16.9 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

- 16.10 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.

- 16.11 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.
- 16.12 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 as 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

- 16.13 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. However 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 we're not left with a visitor centre that is accessed from a substandard junction. If members are minded to approve, officers recommend both a condition and a section 106 legal agreement ensuring that this development does not commence until the works to the Countess Roundabout flyover have, and that the visitor centre can not open until completion of the flyover.

Conclusions

- 16.14 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.

17. The Site Selection Process

- 17.0 One of the most controversial parts of this application has been the choice of the Countess East site. Many objectors feel that many of their problems with the application are the direct result of choosing this site. We must ensure an objective scrutiny of the site chosen against alternatives in the development plan. Just because there is a site that superficially looks better placed it does not follow that it is acceptable in environmental and policy terms. However if a better-suited site emerges from the environmental impact assessment work, then it is material to consideration of this application. The Environmental Statement should identify the best site, which should then be pursued, rather than used to try and justify the most expedient choice. For Countess Road to be acceptable it must be justified by coming out on top of a systematic environmental assessment of it and all other potential sites.
- 17.1 The applicants carried out a wide consideration of alternative sites (as summarised in paragraph 3.0 of the Environmental statement, Volume 1: Text). This work comprised of the exploration of all available land to all points of the compass around the World Heritage Site. It must be emphasised that the World Heritage Site Management Plan makes it an objective to avoid new development within the boundary of the World Heritage Site.
- 17.2 The criteria used to evaluate the potential sites were as follows:
- ## Land ownership constraints
 - ## Proximity to the A303 to minimise traffic impacts on the local highways network
 - ## Archaeology/historical landscape and ecological sensitivity
 - ## Accessibility to Stonehenge monument
 - ## Impact on local communities.
- 17.3 Although these criteria have been applied in an adequate manner and the information presented in the Environmental Statement is acceptable, frankly it could have been done better through the application of an objective rating system of each alternative site. Nevertheless the ES is

considered acceptable having regard to the Regulations (Part II of Schedule 4 to the Regulations and the relevant information set out in Part I of that Schedule) and what the developer can reasonably be required to compile.

17.4 The site selection process as carried out by the applicants is paraphrased below.

Sites to the East of the World Heritage Site.

17.5 With the exception of Countess East they would be east of the river Avon, which would need to be bridged. Land south of the A303 is constrained by Amesbury park Grade II* historic park and conservation area. The Woodford Valley is constrained by nature conservation, floodplain, listed buildings, conservation areas and the Avon Valley Environmentally Sensitive area. Solstice Business Park was discounted due to distance from the WHS and incompatibility with planned land uses.

Sites to the North of the WHS

17.6 To the north lies the Salisbury Plain Training Area owned by the MOD. Access from Countess Roundabout would cause increased traffic on local roads; much of the land is a Special Area of Conservation and candidate Special Area of Conservation. Accessibility would be difficult through the Larkhill military camp and offer a poor visitor experience.

Sites to the West of the WHS

17.7 Land at Airman's Corner has excellent accessibility to the monument and is close to the A303 junction at Longbarrow Crossroads. However site in this area are constrained by extensive archaeology and are considered to be very prominent within the landscape.

Sites to the South of the WHS

17.8 These are remote from the A303 making access difficult and would create impacts on the local very limited road network. It is remote from the monument.

Justification for Preferred Site

17.9 The reasons given by the applicants for choosing Countess Road East as their preferred site in the context of their Environmental Statement, is as follows:

- ## The site lies outside of the WHS boundary in accordance with the Stonehenge WHS Management Plan
- ## The site lies outside of the Special Landscape Area defined in the Salisbury Local Plan
- ## It is the most suitable site in the context of the various land uses and relevant policies
- ## The site has good accessibility to a major junction of the A303.
- ## The site is owned by English Heritage and therefore is deliverable
- ## The site benefits from a Planning Brief endorsed by Salisbury District Council and Wiltshire County Council that provides support in principle for a new visitor centre.

Analysis of the site appraisal and conclusions

17.10 We should not simply accept what English Heritage has stated. There needs to be a verification process of their assertions. Frankly the appraisal of alternative sites is not the strongest part of the Environmental Statement, although it is considered to be adequate in relation to the requirements laid out by the Regulations.

- 17.11 In order to properly validate this work it has been necessary for officers to use information from other sources, especially that from consultees and to take a systematic approach to verifying the conclusions of the Environmental Statement
- 17.12 It becomes clear that the site at Countess Road East is the best site for a new visitor centre. It is outside of the World Heritage Site, relatively free of valuable archaeological remains, it is not a special landscape area and has no other policy designations. It has the excellent communications and furthermore the proximity to Amesbury makes it on sustainable and economic grounds a very good site. It is of course not perfect, it is distant from Stonehenge, it is close to existing residential properties and is bordered by the River Avon Special Area of Conservation. However if further in this report it can be demonstrated that potential conflicts can be satisfactorily mitigated then this site emerges clearly as the best one for the new visitor centre.
- 17.13 Without fail other sites fall because of either being remote from the World Heritage Site and communications or being on land that is prohibitively constrained by environmental constraints such as archaeology, ecology and special landscape quality.

Conclusions

- 17.14 It is considered that the Countess Road site emerges clearly as the best site for a new visitor centre outside of the World Heritage Site.

18. Selection of the Land Train Route

- 18.0 As with the selection of the site for the visitor centre, the proposed route for the land train is a contentious one. This is especially so as it passes in fairly close proximity to the residential properties in Strangways and Fargo Road. And as with the visitor centre a similar systematic approach should have informed the route selection process based on an assessment and comparison of the environmental impacts of each. The Environmental Statement should identify the best route, which should then be pursued, rather than used to try and justify the most expedient choice.
- 18.1 The applicants carried out a wide consideration of alternative sites (as summarised in paragraph 3.3 and Appendix 3.2 of the Environmental Statement, Volume 1: Text). This work comprised of the exploration of a number of potential routes from Countess East to Stonehenge across the World Heritage Site and their evaluation against a set of criteria. These criteria were as follows:
- 18.2 The criteria used to evaluate the potential sites were as follows:
- ## Accessibility
 - ## Visitor experience
 - ## Archaeological and historic environment impact
 - ## Nature conservation impact
 - ## Community impact
 - ## Deliverability
 - ## Affordability
 - ## Objectives of the WHS Management Plan.
- 18.3 These criteria have been applied the Environmental Statement in an adequate way which is considered to meet the requirements of the Environmental Regulations. However to be frank, it could have been even stronger if a scoring system has been used and the criteria weighted to bring about a conclusion. Nevertheless the information is acceptable for the purposes of process, having regard to the Regulations (Part II of Schedule 4 to the Regulations and the relevant

information set out in Part I of that Schedule) and what the developer can reasonably be required to compile.

- 18.4 The site selection appraisal of each route as explained in the Environmental Statement is summarised as follows.

Northern Route

- 18.5 **Main Benefits:** The route outside of the central area of the WHS; it would provide easy access and best walk from drop off point to the stones along Byway 12; use of existing byways would reduce the need new tracks in the landscape; it provides further intermediate drop off options.
- 18.6 **Constraints:** Archaeological Issues, impact of the land train on the setting of the Cursus, proximity to neighbours

Eastern Route.

- 18.7 Comprising a drop-off at Stonehenge Cottages adjacent to the existing route of the A303.
- 18.8 **Main benefits:** route outside of central area of the WHS; good to monument along former line of A303;
- 18.9 **Constraints:** adverse archaeological impact; effect of presence and noise from nearby tunnel portal, steep gradients for pedestrians and disabled.

Central Route

- 18.10 **Main benefits:** route located outside of central area of WHS; would not impact on the Avenue; drop off point on previously developed land (Seven Barrows Cottages); excellent viewing point at King Barrows Ridge (enhanced visitor experience); pedestrian access is across open grassland along route of the ancient Avenue.
- 18.11 **Constraints:** would not provide for dispersed access, erosion of this downland soils; disabled access is not possible;

Justification for Preferred Option

- 18.12 The applicants preferred option is a dispersed access route (see description of development on page 6). There justification for this choice is based on the following:

- ## Land train route would be located outside of the central area of the WHS
- ## The multiple drop- off points (4 including the Cursus and Woodhenge interim stops) would encourage a dispersed pattern of visitor access to avoid excessive point loading that could erode thin chalk grassland
- ## Provides a variety of access to a wider area of the WHS
- ## Provides equality of access experience for all visitors including independent access for the disabled
- ## Allows a flexible system that can respond to fluctuations in demand
- ## Strikes a balance between providing easy access and conservation of the environment
- ## The adverse impacts on the Cursus are, due to construction methods, reversible.

Analysis of the route appraisal and conclusions

- 18.13 We should not simply accept what English Heritage has stated. There needs to be a verification process of their assertions. Frankly the appraisal of alternative sites is not the strongest part of the Environmental statement., although it does present enough information in a manner that satisfies the Regulations and allows us to make an evaluation of the alternatives. Application of a systematic scoring system to allow a ready comparison of potential sites, would have been even better.
- 18.14 In order to properly validate this work it has been necessary for officers to apply a systematic approach to potential route consideration, using both the Environmental Statement and information from other sources such as that provided by consultees. This was to test whether the conclusion supports the applicants' assertions.
- 18.15 It is the case that were the applicants seeking a single point of access that the central route would be the best option with regard to impacts of the environment. While there would be some adverse impacts on the thin grassland, this could through careful stewardship be largely mitigated. The train route to the Kings Barrow drop off point is direct and discreet in the landscape and utilises previously developed land as the drop off. However there are some serious problems of relying solely on this route. This route does require a fairly challenging walk to the Stones and the mobility impaired and wheelchair users would not find this practical. This would necessitate running a park and ride shuttle bus through the road system and down a retained A344 which is contrary to objectives of the development plan and World Heritage Site Management Plan. The latter document also emphasises the objective of seeking dispersed access through out the World Heritage Site rather than a single point of access
- 18.16 The northern route does have benefits of allowing relatively easy access for all but the most severely disabled to approach the Stones. It is outside of the core area and discreet in the landscape and will not be viewed from the monument and its core area. However there are concerns over the nature of the adverse impact on the archaeological ditch feature known as the Cursus, the amenity of neighbouring residents and on wildlife habitats in the existing tree belts adjacent to the route. The detailed environmental assessment of these impacts is included in part 26 of this report which follows at page 54, however in summary while the impacts on neighbours and wildlife can be mitigated through design and condition, there could potentially be significant adverse impact upon the Cursus.
- 18.17 Therefore the decision we must make is whether the objectives of securing a dispersed access, open to all, in a manner proposed by the Management Plan, outweighs the potentially adverse impact upon the Cursus.

Conclusion

- 18.18 The idea of having a range of access options encouraged by two land train routes is a good one and supports a key objective of the World Heritage Site Management Plan. Visitors will be encouraged to explore much more of the area than just Stonehenge itself. If the best option were solely relied upon (the Central Route) this would mean that disabled visitors could not share in the experience of approaching the monument with their family and friends and would need to be taken via a shuttle bus. This would mean the retention of the A344 as a much more recognisable road than current plans propose.
- 18.19 To overcome this problem the applicants propose two routes, which incorporates the northern route. While this is the second best route, with no other serious contenders being available, it does have significant adverse impacts upon archaeological features in the landscape, namely the great Cursus.
- 18.20 This is a finely balanced issue that goes to the heart of this application.

- 18.21 Archaeological appraisal and feedback from consultees agrees that while the land train would impact adversely on the setting of the Cursus, it would have no direct impact on the archaeology due to the track design to lay over the surface with no ground disturbance in a fully reversible manner. When considered in conjunction with the substantial benefits of securing dispersed access and removal of inappropriate development from the setting of Stonehenge, then it is considered that the is reversibility with no direct impact is the clinching argument.
- 18.22 Therefore while there would be some adverse impacts, they will be reversible and leave no permanent damage and that when the access proposals are taken as a whole they will bring substantial benefits to the World Heritage Site.

19. Landscape Impact Analysis

- 19.0 As with any major planning application, there is a need to assess the visual and physical impact that the proposals will have on the landscape within which it stands. This project is slightly different in that the principle reason for its submission is to secure removal of features of adverse landscape impact from the setting of Stonehenge. Therefore we need to weigh up the impact of the scheme against the benefits to determine whether landscape impacts are acceptable.
- 19.1 Part 15 of this report highlights how the visitor centre site is designed to a very high quality in a manner that as far as possible minimises impacts on the landscape. The clever design of the building allows it to merge into the landscape and this is reinforced by land resculpting and substantial new planting to largely conceal the car park from external views.
- 19.2 The routes of the landtrain have been well chosen to minimise their impact on the landscape. They largely follow the routes of existing byways and use existing tree belts and ridgelines to conceal them from site when viewed from Stonehenge monument and its core area. The drop off points and shelters have been designed with the same care as the proposed visitor centre building and are lightweight and largely transparent in nature forming very subtle, inconspicuous structures in the landscape. The Environmental Statement acknowledges that there would be moderate adverse impact on the residents of the Fargo Road and minor impact on those using existing rights of way.
- 19.3 The adverse impacts should be evaluated against the major landscape benefits of allowing the existing visitor centre and A344 to be removed from the vicinity of Stonehenge.

Conclusion

- 19.4 The substantial landscape benefits of removing inappropriate developments from the setting of Stonehenge, together with the thoughtful design of visitor centre, car park and land train route, mean that overall this planning application will bring significant net benefits to the landscape.

20. Access Strategy

- 20.0 Previous sections have focused on the choice of land train route, however there is also the need to look at access in the wider meaning to assess whether the proposals represent an acceptable way forward.
- 20.1 Both the development plan, WHS Management Plan and Planning Brief underpin the objective of improving general access to and enjoyment of the World Heritage Site. An application which is in

the major part a response to the objectives of the Management Plan is expected to demonstrate how wider access, in particularly for walkers, cyclist and horseriders is to be delivered.

- 20.2 The scheme represents a significant and tangible improvement to access within the World Heritage Site and in particular the following components that will be delivered through implementation of this application would be welcome:

- ## Traffic Regulation Orders would restrict traffic movements along Byway 12
- ## Traffic Regulation Order to restrict traffic movements along the downgraded A344
- ## Dispersed land train drop off points promoting exploration of wider areas of the WHS
- ## Removal of existing car park and Visitor Centre
- ## Provision of electric wheelchairs at Durrington Farm and King Barrow Ridge to assist less able visitors enjoy a much greater experience of the WHS
- ## Provision for Anglers to use the car park and have continued access to the River Avon at Countess East
- ## Enhanced surfacing of Byways will encourage cycling and cycle hire will be available at the new visitor centre
- ## The proposed Sustrans long distance cycle route from Ridgeway and Avebury to Salisbury would pass through the visitor centre.

- 20.3 On the negative side there will be some minor adverse affect because of the proximity of the land train route to other users, including a crossing point.

Conclusions

- 20.4 It is considered that the comprehensive access strategy that will be facilitated through the implementation of this planning application represents a major benefit to the area through the encouragement of greater access understanding and enjoyment of this unique environment.

21. Noise and Disturbance

- 21.0 One of the most contentious parts of this application is that to many local residents it appears that choices have been made on the part of the applicant, which almost willfully appears to bring the development close to existing residential properties. By both proposing the Countess East site and also incorporating the northern route for the land train, it has been argued that this brings the development in contact with the maximum number of residents. This is a prime argument that the community has put forward for stating in large numbers that the site is simply in the wrong place and that a site to the west of the Fargo Plantation towards Airman's Cross would solve these potential conflicts at a stroke.
- 21.1 However this is not so clear-cut. The rationale for the selection of both the visitor centre site and the land train route stands up to scrutiny (see parts 17 and 18 above) and alternative sites invariably have environmental constraints which render them in land use planning terms worse. That being so it is an obligation on this Authority to assess the likely impacts upon the neighbours and to decide whether, with suitable mitigation impacts can be minimised to acceptable levels, or on the other side of the coin whether impacts will be so detrimental to peoples enjoyment of their homes that refusal of the application is the only option.
- 21.2 Noise and disturbance both in the short term during construction works and in the longer term through the operation of the centre and the land train, are fundamental issues here.
- 21.3 The applicants have carried out noise analysis within their Environmental Statement, which indicates that noise levels will be kept within acceptable limits. However your officers have considered this issue so important that we have engaged consultants (Casella Stanger) who have carried out rigorous independent tests and scrutiny of the likely noise disturbance the proposals

may cause. This has been seen as crucial in order to robustly test the information within the Environmental Statement.

- 21.4 The independent work has verified the findings of the Environmental Statement and has concluded that providing conditions are applied to limit the maximum noise of the land train and visitor centre operation together with a limit on the hours of operation, then no material detriment will accrue to the residents of nearby properties. Should members be minded to approve this application then the conditions recommended to limit noise and operating times are considered essential to safeguard the amenity of neighbours

22. Sustainability

- 22.0 Striving to realise sustainable patterns and forms of new development underpins all of the national and local planning policies. It is a fundamental consideration. This means sustainability in its widest sense including, location, relationship to existing settlements, travel requirements, energy and resource efficiency, prevention of pollution, flooding and waste management.
- 22.1 The planning application is supported by a comprehensive appraisal of the sustainability of the scheme, in addition to the Environmental Statement. A travel plan is also incorporated within a Traffic Assessment that has also been submitted.

Travel plans

- 22.2 The Travel Plan adequately addresses how the development will encourage alternative modes of transport other than the private car. Alternative modes of transport such as cycling, walking, and public transport are all positively encouraged for both staff and visitors. The critique of the access strategy above (see page 41) also forms part of the encouragement.
- 22.3 The provision of 500+ car parking spaces clearly shows that visits will for the foreseeable future be dominated by the private car, but given the location of Stonehenge it is unlikely that any alternative sites could be less reliant. Furthermore the proximity of the site to Amesbury does provide for the encouragement of linked trips and local employment, which will benefit the local economy and existing patterns of land use, in a more sustainable fashion than the current relationships.

Energy and Resource Efficiency

- 22.4 The design of the new centre and the scheme does incorporate principles of sustainable development including predominantly re-used and recycled materials, natural insulation and passive solar gain, water saving technology, high efficiency boilers, and low emission LPG land train. The sustainability appraisal is convincing and it is clear that the design of this proposal has had the aims of delivering environmentally sustainable outcomes planned in from the outset.

Pollution

- 22.5 Policy G2 of the Local Plan requires consideration of public health and pollution from light, noise; exhaust fumes, contaminated run-off, waste and litter.
- 22.6 The applicants have submitted a construction management plan that is aimed at controlling pollution during the building phase. This document is good, but should members be minded to approve this application then it is suggested that its implementation be secured through condition. Due to the distance of the car park from neighbours and the landscape barriers, which are proposed, it is not considered that exhaust fumes will cause a problem.