



NT

THE NATIONAL TRUST

for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty

Rec.	26 NOV 2009
Acknowledged
Copy to
Action

WESSEX REGIONAL OFFICE · EASTLEIGH COURT · BISHOPSTROW
WARMINSTER · WILTSHIRE BA12 9HW

Telephone +44 (0)1985 843600 · Facsimile +44 (0)1985 843624 · Website www.nationaltrust.org.uk

Wiltshire Council
Development Services
Planning Office
61 Wyndham Road
Salisbury
SP1 3AH

E-mail
Direct Tel
Your Ref S/2009/1527
Our Ref SH EIP PA1
Date 25th November 2009

Dear Sir/Madam

Application number S/2009/1527 Decommissioning of existing visitor facilities and a section of the A344; the erection of a new visitors centre, car park, coach park and ancillary services building at Airman's Corner; and related highways and landscaping works.

The National Trust has carefully considered the application and supporting material in relation to the above application.

As the main landowner within the World Heritage Site, the Trust is acutely aware of the important opportunity currently available dramatically to improve the environment around the Stones and provide enhanced visitor facilities to this internationally significant site. We are however required, by our statutory purpose, to assess the potential impacts of development on the Trust's interests, in the same way as we would for any other planning application.

Our analysis of the most significant planning policy statements suggests the critical issues requiring careful judgement revolve around the World Heritage Site and Special Landscape Area designations and interpretation of policies relating to them.

We consider the key question is whether the proposed building and parking is "in keeping" with the WHS as required by WHSMP policy 4j. [Policies 5a and 5b are met]. Arguably, as the new facilities are not visible from most of the WHS, including the Stones, and are located right on the edge of the WHS, the impact on it is minimal; though there are inevitably some impacts such as visibility from the Cursus.

The WHS Circular 07/09 requires the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of a WHS to be protected through appropriate policies but also refers to "*enhancing the WHS where appropriate*" and "*striking a balance between conservation, biodiversity, access, the interests of the local community and the sustainable economic use ...*" of the WHS.

The Trust takes the view that, while any building in this area with associated parking etc, will have some visual impact, the OUV of the WHS is not significantly

PRESIDENT: HRH THE PRINCE OF WALES

REGIONAL CHAIRMAN: RICHARD WILKIN LVO MBE REGIONAL DIRECTOR: BRENDAN MCCARTHY

Registered Office: Heelis · Kemble Drive · Swindon · Wiltshire · SN2 2NA

Registered Charity Number: 205846

compromised as a result of the proposals and the chosen site is better than any of the other available options. In our view, overall the net benefit for the OUV is strongly positive, taking into account the improvements at the Stones themselves and improved visitor experience which more than offset the landscape losses that come with the new visitor facilities.

We also note that Structure Plan policy C9 and Local Plan policy C6 both allow new development within the Special Landscape Area but require that siting, design and scale should be sympathetic to the character of the Special Landscape Area. The applicants themselves recognise that there is some impact on landscape character arising from the new facilities. This largely arises from the scale of the new building in otherwise open and undeveloped wider landscape. However, the Landscape Impact Assessment indicates the quality of the landscape is judged to be 'moderate' there and the site is somewhat enclosed at the head of a valley.

There remain areas of uncertainty in the current application with regard to how elements of the scheme will operate. We consider these to be matters of important detail which the Trust is confident may be resolved in discussion with English Heritage as plans develop.

In summary, the Trust has concluded that the net benefits arising from the removal of the existing, grossly unsatisfactory, visitor facilities and the closure of the A344 are sufficient to warrant living with some landscape impacts at Airman's Corner associated with a new building and extensive car and coach parking.

The Trust therefore is not raising an objection to Planning Application number S/2009/1527 which it strongly supports.

Yours faithfully

B M McCarthy
Director for Wessex