



14 The Croft
Bishopstone
Salisbury
Wiltshire
SP5 4DF

29th November 2009

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

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 Wessex Region of the Council for British Archaeology (CBA Wessex) is a regional group of the Council for British Archaeology (CBA) and represents those members of the CBA in Wiltshire, Dorset, Berkshire, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight and the Channel Islands. This region therefore includes the Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site within its area. It is an educational charity working to involve people in archaeology and promote appreciation and care of the historic environment for the benefit of present and future generations. The Regional Group has a membership of c. 650, comprising both individuals and institutions.

CBA Wessex has been an active participant for many years in the debates concerning both the Stonehenge Visitor Centre and A303 improvement schemes. We have been represented on many committees during this period and are currently a member of the Stonehenge WHS Advisory Forum and, as such, we were involved in the production of both the original Stonehenge WHS Management Plan in 2000 and its 2009 update.

CBA Wessex is pleased to have the opportunity to comment on this planning application for a new Stonehenge visitor centre as we are keen to see improvements in the experience of visitors to this iconic site and we are also aware of the wish to have these

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improvements in place before the 2012 Olympics. Our responses to the various aspects of the planning application are as follows.

The Visitor Centre - its scale and its location in the landscape – We refer back to the CBA Wessex response to the Public Consultation on the future of Stonehenge, when a number of visitor centre locations were proposed. In that response we stated that development at Airman’s Corner was not originally our preferred choice as it was not the ideal site for visitor and car parking facilities as any construction would inevitably adversely affect the OUV of the World Heritage Site, but we agreed that something low key and reversible at this location would be worth serious consideration. The Stonehenge WHS Management Plan Policy 4j refers to the construction of “... improved visitor facilities in keeping with the WHS ...” and we had been hoping for something appropriately unobtrusive.

The visitor centre building proposed in this application does not look temporary and is certainly not low key and it will be clearly visible from the western end of the Cursus. We therefore ask that careful consideration is given to modifying the proposed design so that is less prominent and we believe that an improved planting scheme can assist in achieving this outcome.

In spite of the above reservations, CBA Wessex does accept that these new proposals represent a significant improvement on the present facilities and we therefore do not intend to raise an objection to Planning Application No S/2009/1957.

CBA Wessex also wishes to raise the following issues although we accept they are of less significance than the issue raised above and could be dealt with in a post-decision phase.

Screening – The planting and screening included in the application will not adequately minimise the visual impact of the visitor facilities and we request that the landscape strategy is extended to increase the proposed screening. This will inevitably involve extending the development area to include adjacent land. It is recommended that the planting schemes should be based on clumps of local varieties of trees and shrubs rather than blocks of conifers. However we recognize that this sensitive landscape is not ideally suited to extensive tree or shrub planting so the ability to mitigate the visual impact of the proposals will be limited.

Travel Plan – WHSMP Policy 5d calls for “...an exemplary Green Travel Plan to encourage access to the Site other than by car.” The Travel Plan in the application fails to match this policy and it is obvious that it will in the future be harder for walkers and cyclists to reach the visitor centre. The provision of cycle racks at both the visitor centre and the retained hub near Stonehenge are also inadequate.

Visitor Transit Scheme – We would wish to see the detailed proposals for transporting visitors from the visitor centre to Stonehenge. Any proposed turning circle at the Stonehenge drop off point should be kept to the minimum as it should be possible to devise a system so that only the tractor unit is turned rather than the entire land-train (or whatever transit system is proposed). We would also wish to see details of proposed

footpaths for those visitors who choose to walk either from the visitor centre or from Fargo.

The retained portion of the A344 – We propose that the retained section of the A344, from the visitor centre to the Stonehenge drop-off point, is resurfaced with a green material so that it becomes less of a visual intrusion in the landscape.

The redundant portion of the A344 – Various summary documents in the planning application refer to the “ removal of the A344 road between Byway 12 and Stonehenge Bottom.” An examination of the detail indicates that it is proposed to lay some topsoil over the punctured tarmac which cannot be construed as “removal of the A344” as the line of the redundant road will remain clearly visible, especially during dry weather. We request that the tarmac surface is removed in its entirety together with as much of the road foundations as is practicable.

Light Pollution – Salisbury Plain is a place of dark skies and should remain so. This view is reinforced by the Stonehenge WHS Management Plan in Policy 31 and the statement in paragraph 14.1.19 that “Light pollution, ... is inappropriate in a landscape with monuments celebrated for their astronomical alignments.” Any lighting at the visitor centre should be kept to the absolute minimum and we see no justification for any street lighting at the proposed new roundabout at Airman’s Corner or the remodelled roundabout at Longbarrow Crossroads.

CBA Wessex hopes that the above comments will be of assistance in the decision making process and we are keen to offer our support in achieving that best balance between improving visitor experience and preserving the integrity of the Stonehenge World Heritage Site.

Yours faithfully

FRS Taylor
On behalf of the Trustees of CBA Wessex