



Archaeology for all

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

Planning Department
Rec. 01 DEC 2009
Acknowledged
Copy to
Action

30 November 2009

Dear Sir or Madam,

Planning application S/2009/1527: Decommissioning of existing visitor facilities and section of A344; erection of new visitor centre, car park, coach park, and ancillary service building at Airman's Corner; and related highway and landscaping works

1. The Council for British Archaeology is an educational charity working throughout the UK to involve people in archaeology and to promote appreciation and care of the historic environment for the benefit of present and future generations.

Background

2. The Council for British Archaeology (CBA) is pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the planning application for a new visitor centre and related works in the Stonehenge World Heritage Site.

3. In its response to the public consultation on 'The Future of Stonehenge' in 2008, the CBA commented in detail on the options for environmental improvements and new visitor facilities at Stonehenge.

Council for British Archaeology

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4. The CBA is strongly in support of improvements to the experience of visitors to the Stonehenge WHS and to enhance its public enjoyment. It supported the choice of the Airman's Corner site for new facilities as part of a sustainable 21st-century solution to the dual challenges of improving visitor access and conservation for this outstandingly important landscape. Its views on the current application reflect the principles that the CBA set out in its 2008 position statement on Stonehenge.

CBA views on this application

5. The CBA has considered the application in relation to the policies recently published in Planning Circular (07/2009) on WHS and particularly that local planning authorities should aim to satisfy both of the following principles:

- protecting the World Heritage Site and its setting, including any buffer zone, from inappropriate development
- striking a balance between the needs of conservation, biodiversity, access, the interests of the local community and the sustainable economic use of the World Heritage Site in its setting.

6. The CBA is also mindful of the principles it set for itself in considering future development and management issues at Stonehenge which should achieve:

- 6.1 the protection and conservation of Stonehenge and its associated monuments in their surrounding landscape
- 6.2 the enhancement of public understanding, enjoyment and access
- 6.3 an environmentally sustainable approach.

7. In terms of protection (6.1), archaeological evaluation to date suggests that the archaeological interest of the proposed site is relatively limited and could also, if it proved more significant, be protected by design. It appears that the new facilities would not be visible from much of the World Heritage Site nor from the Stones themselves. However, the new visitor centre building and its associated infrastructure will have an impact, as the application acknowledges, on the OUV of the World Heritage Site. The scale and siting of the new building, in an open landscape and in alignment with the west end of the Cursus monument, mean that it will be clearly visible from it. The CBA's view is that careful consideration should be given to how this visual impact can be further reduced. The design of the visitor centre building is some way from the low key, short-term solution for visitor services that was anticipated. Its visibility is accentuated by its relatively large footprint and the height demanded both by the design and by the need to avoid undue disturbance below ground. We recommend that close consideration is given to the scope for designing the building to sit lower in the landscape with a lesser visual impact. A more effective screen of planting to an appropriate design would also contribute to reducing this. The impact of the extensive parking areas, associated lighting and new highway lighting should also be addressed. The effect of these in the World Heritage Site (reflected light by day and illumination by night) could potentially be considerable. Design to reduce light pollution and introduce an appropriate level of screening with suitable planting is essential.

8. In terms of enhancement (6.2), the impacts above can be balanced with the undoubted benefits that will be achieved by the closure of the A344, the removal of the unsightly, intrusive elements of the current visitor facilities close to the Stones and the treatment of the former A344 road to remove the section between Stonehenge Bottom and

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Byway 12. Greatly improved visitor interpretation and other facilities should also transform the experience and there will be opportunities to appreciate the wider cultural landscape in which Stonehenge stands. Other desirable enhancements would include the treatment of the A344 between Airman's Corner and Byway 12 which should seek to minimise the former road's landscape impact. This is the ideal opportunity to reduce the width and introduce a surface to reduce visibility and noise.

9. In terms of environmental sustainability (6.3), the proposals respect the aim that development should be reversible and in accordance with principles and best practice for sustainable development and construction. More attention, however, should be given to sustainable travel and access particularly for cyclists and pedestrians not arriving by car.

10. Having supported in principle the siting of a new visitor centre at Airman's Corner, the CBA has no wish to make an objection at this late stage in the planning of the new facilities. Its view is that the current proposals are acceptable in outline but that careful consideration must be given to the aspects of the application mentioned above (7. - 9.) to reduce the impacts of the development. The CBA believes these matters can be resolved and, having come this close to a solution to the long-standing challenge of providing appropriate visitor services for Stonehenge, wishes to give its support to the planning authority and the applicants in achieving the best balance between the impact of new development in the World Heritage Site and the substantial enhancement of public understanding, enjoyment and access which the new proposals should bring.

Yours faithfully,



Dr Mike Heyworth MBE
Director, Council for British Archaeology

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