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Department for Transport, Environment & Leisure
County Hall
Bythesea Road
Trowbridge
Wiltshire
BA14 8JN

Your ref:
Our ref: PT/S/09/1527 and 1528

22nd December 2009

Dear Adam

Re: Planning Applications S/09/1528 (Listed Building Consent – Airmans Cross) and S/09/1527, Proposed new Stonehenge Visitor Centre, Airmans Corner, Winterbourne Stoke

I refer to my consultation response letter dated 5th November, and the subsequent correspondence you have received from the Department. I apologise for any confusion caused as a result of conflicting requirements, and would ask that all previous correspondence be superseded by this letter. It hopefully addresses the inconsistencies in the transport and highways correspondence to date, and reflects the discussions at our recent (8th December) meeting with the applicant, the National Trust and the Highways Agency. In particular it clarifies the local highway authority position in relation to the proposals at Stonehenge Bottom, and future access to that part of the A344 which is to be subject to an application for a (s247) stopping-up order.

Having considered both of the above proposals, I make the following response to the consultation in respect of transport and highways considerations:

S/09/1528 - Airmans Cross, LB Consent

This proposal relates to the relocation of the Airmans Cross to a new site within the curtilage of the proposed Stonehenge Visitor Centre.

The proposal is fully supported by the highway authority. No objection is raised, if the arrangements are subject to a planning obligation to provide, inter alia, for i) the temporary storage of the cross ii) the proper cleaning and restoration prior to its relocation to the proposed site, and iii) an undertaking from English Heritage to maintain the Cross in good order whilst in their care. (Ownership of the Cross is uncertain, but there is a view that the Council, as highway authority has a claim to the Cross. It is recommended that the Cross be transferred into the care of English Heritage in perpetuity)

My recommendation is:

No objection subject to the consent being withheld until an appropriate planning agreement has been completed.

S/09/1527 – Proposed Stonehenge Visitor Centre

The proposal is supported in principle, but there are concerns that need to be addressed.

The County Council (and, by association, the highway authority) previously agreed in principle to the closure of the A344 to motorised vehicles in order to facilitate objectives of the Stonehenge Master Plan, and the provision of the proposed Visitor Centre. (Ref: Wiltshire County Council Cabinet Report 21st October 2008, Minutes appended hereto). In particular resolution numbers (ii) and (iv) guide this response.

The submitted Transport Assessment identifies the impacts associated with the closure of the A344, and I accept that the transport implications for the local highway network are not sufficient to warrant a recommendation of refusal, despite forecast increased traffic flows on the Packway. There will be added difficulties on the A303, especially on the link between Stonehenge Bottom and Longbarrow, but again these are not regarded as sufficient to justify a refusal of the application, given the benefits of junction improvements proposed at Longbarrow.

The proposal to provide a roundabout junction at Airmans Corner is supported. The proposed junction should materially improve safety at the junction, and there are no forecast capacity issues here.

There are several proposals on the drawings that require modification:

The gating of the A344 at the location shown (immediately to the east of the proposed roundabout) is not acceptable in road safety terms. Any gating arrangements will be covered under the provisions of a planning agreement, and will be required to ensure that vehicles confronted by a gate on the A344 can turn to approach the roundabout in forward gear.

The coach park exit onto the B3089 should be laid out so as to provide for, but not encourage, right turn movements. The current kerbing arrangement is overly engineered, and could encourage such movements.

I believe these two points can be addressed via detailed drawings to be approved under the provisions of a planning agreement

Access to the site by sustainable modes needs to be considered within the framework of the Stonehenge Management Plan. This access is currently poor, with the A303 to the south acting as a major severance. There are several policies which relate to sustainable access, the key ones are:

“Policy 4d Access and circulation to key archaeological sites within the WHS landscape should be encouraged (taking into account archaeological and ecological needs) to increase public awareness and enjoyment.

Action:

- Develop circular routes linking archaeological sites for walkers and cyclists”

“Policy 5d Measures should be taken through an exemplary Green Travel Plan to encourage access to the Site other than by car.

Actions:

- Develop a Green Transport Plan for the whole WHS.
- Encourage a decrease the % of visitors arriving at Stonehenge by car
- Produce a sustainable transport plan for the new visitor facilities covering access to and within the WHS
- Increase and promote public transport to Stonehenge and the WHS, in particular bus links from Salisbury train station
- Encourage cycling in the WHS and long distance cycling routes”.

The TA explains why a refuge (for pedestrians and cyclists) has not been proposed in the carriageway of the A303 at Stonehenge Bottom. However, pedestrians and cyclists will inevitably arrive (as they do now) at Stonehenge Bottom and need to cross the road at that point. There is scope to consider other measures which might include encouraging users of this route to cross at more appropriate points along the A303. The path from Old Stonehenge Road to Stonehenge Bottom is generally acceptable to accommodate the pedestrian and cycle traffic that might be anticipated to use the route, although some minor changes in relation to precise crossing points need to be considered at detailed design stage. I suggest, below, a condition that allows for performance of any crossing arrangement to be assessed and monitored through established safety audit techniques.

Sustainable access to the WHS site as a whole must be addressed and agreed during this stage of the process as there will be a number of physical measures which must be undertaken, it will not be acceptable to leave it until the production of the Green Travel Plan. The following modifications to the existing rights of way and road network will be required in order to provide sustainable access to the visitor centre and the wider WHS:

- 1) The surfacing of Byway 12 from the A344 up to Fargo Road (Dealt with by condition below)
- 2) Upgrading of the National Trust permissive footpath between Byways 12 and 11 to Restricted Byway status (This issue is not appropriate to condition, but EH should be encouraged to accede to the request, in order to avoid potential conflict on the A303 between its junctions with the two byways).
- 3) An off-road cycle link beginning just south of the coach park exit on the east side of the B3086, passing round the corner and along the north side of the existing A344, finishing at the cycle parking. This would avoid cyclists bound for the B3086 having to negotiate the roundabout.*
- 4) Bus stops on the A360 and connecting paths are required to facilitate passengers using those services unable to enter the site.*

* These issues will be addressed through the detailed drawings required under the provisions of the planning agreement

Securing future pedestrian and cycle access to that part of the A344 south east of Byway 12 will be dealt with in the planning agreement.

My recommendation is:

No objection subject to:-

Consent being withheld until a planning agreement, generally in accordance with the travelling draft (available), has been completed, and the following conditions:

- Prior to the commencement of the development, details of the Visitor Transit System shall be submitted to and approved by the local planning authority; such details to demonstrate the efficacy of the turning and waiting facilities proposed, at both operational ends of the site, and in the overnight parking area.

Reason: To ensure that the proposed layout can properly accommodate the operational requirements of the VTS trains.

Informative: The VTS will be running on a public highway. It must therefore comply with all necessary legislation related to such vehicles.

- Notwithstanding the details of gating arrangements shown on the submitted drawings, the applicant shall, prior to the commencement of the development, obtain approval from the local planning authority to further detailed drawings showing how vehicles accessing the A344 can turn around and return westbound in forward gear, including all points where access is restricted by proposed gating.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety and to avoid the inconvenience otherwise caused to larger vehicles that might need to gain access for highway maintenance or other purposes.

- Prior to the commencement of the development the applicant shall submit to and secure the approval of the local planning authority a scheme demonstrating how any gating or bollarding measures on the A344 are to be operated, their legal status, and what provisions are to be made for vehicles reasonably requiring access to the public highway and, beyond, to the stopped up section of A344 between Byway 12 and Stonehenge Bottom. Gating arrangements shall only be provided and operated in accordance with the approved scheme.

Reason: To demonstrate that a managed scheme will allow for the requirements of all proper vehicular users of the highway at all times of the day and night throughout the year.

- Prior to the commencement of the development the applicant shall submit to and secure approval of the local planning authority to a scheme demonstrating how visitors during exceptional circumstances, such as summer solstice, will be accommodated, and afforded legal access to their temporary parking facilities via the A344. Parking arrangements shall be implemented in accordance with the approved scheme.

Reason: To ensure that local road congestion is not caused at the proposed Airmans Corner roundabout junction during exceptionally high levels of visitation, and in a circumstance where enforcement of a traffic regulation order could otherwise cause access difficulties.

- Development hereby permitted shall not commence until (i) details of the pedestrian and cycle route along the whole of the A344, including crossing arrangements at the A303 (Stonehenge Bottom) and (ii) a scheme for reviewing such access and crossing arrangements, have been submitted to and approved (in consultation with the Secretary of State for Transport) in writing by the local planning authority. The development shall not be occupied until the agreed works have been completed. Any changes shall be implemented in accordance with the approved scheme.

Reason: To accommodate and facilitate the inevitable future local pedestrian and cyclist demand travelling the route between the Stones and west Amesbury, and provision of a safe crossing point on the A303 when the right turn facility currently in place is removed.

Informative: For the avoidance of doubt, the scheme for reviewing the access and crossing arrangements shall have regard to Design Manual for Roads and Bridges HD19/03 Stage 4 Safety Audit 12 and 36 month post-scheme recommendations for remedial action. It shall detail how recommended remedial action will be funded and implemented, including arrangements to provide for alternative crossing points on the A303 and associated access links.

- Before the proposed visitor centre is open for public use, the developer shall upgrade the surface of Byway 12 between the A344 and the Sustrans National Cycle Route 45.

Reason: In order to facilitate the objectives of the travel planning requirements for the site insofar as they relate to encouraging pedestrian and cycle transport.

- Prior to the commencement of the development, a scheme and programme for cycle parking and storage provision at the western and eastern end of the retained highway A344 shall be submitted for approval to the local planning authority. The facilities shall be provided in accordance with the approved scheme and programme.

Reason: In order to facilitate the objectives of the travel planning requirements for the site insofar as they relate to encouraging pedestrian and cycle transport, and to discourage random parking of cycles within the vicinities of the Stones and the proposed Visitor Centre.

Yours sincerely,

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Appendix

Extract of Minutes of Cabinet Meeting held on 21st October 2008

109. **Stonehenge World Heritage Site Management Plan and Environmental Improvements**

The Cabinet considered the report of the Director of Environmental Services in relation to the most recent proposals for Stonehenge put forward by English Heritage and which requested agreement of the County Council's response to the consultation.

Additional correspondence from Mr West, County Councillor, Winterbourne Stoke Parish Council and Durrington Town Council were also circulated to members.

The Leader referred to the consultation event that had been held in Amesbury at which English Heritage had presented their detailed proposals. The consensus from that meeting was that sites X and Y, as referred to within the plan circulated with the officer's report, were preferred and there was little, if any, support for sites W or Z.

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport and Economic Development moved the recommendations contained within the report and suggested that site X should be put forward as the preferred option. This was the closest site to the actual Stones themselves and would reduce the demand for park and ride facilities. The Cabinet Member emphasised that the Council would continue to press the Government for improvements to the A303.

The Cabinet Member for Culture agreed that sites X and Y were the strongest candidates but pointed out that site X was the most archaeologically sensitive site. If this site were chosen as the preferred option it would be important that archaeological matters were considered with regard to the specific location of the visitor centre within the overall site.

The Cabinet Member for Staffing and Customer Care spoke as local Member for the Durrington and Bulford electoral division. As far as the residents of Larkhill were concerned they could not support a visitor centre at site W as this would be directly adjacent to a working farm and residential houses.

The Leader agreed that site X should be put forward as the preferred option but also suggested that the campaign for improvements to the A303 should be continued with Government.

Mr West the local member for the Wilton and Wylve electoral division referred to his letter dated 14 October 2008 and the enclosure which had been circulated to members of the Cabinet. The enclosure was the report of the Public Inquiry into the A303 Stonehenge Improvement which concluded that the closure of the A344 independently of the proposed improvement of the A303 would not be justifiable and that it would lead to increased congestion on the A303 and elsewhere within the local road system. He emphasised that nothing had changed since then and local people would feel let down if the closure of the A344 proceeded without the associated improvements to the A303.

It was acknowledged that the Highways Agency probably would have the power to close the junction at Stonehenge Bottom without the prior consent of the County Council.

In response the Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport and Economic Development pointed out that the closure of the A344 would make the pressure on the A303 more obvious and highlight the problems.

Resolved:

(i) To support the Objectives and Aims of the Management Plan, particularly Aim 7, and to adopt the relevant parts as a Supplementary Planning Document in due course.

(ii) To support the Stonehenge Environmental Improvements, with Option 3A (site X) being the preferred site for the new visitor facilities subject to archaeological considerations being taken into account before the specific location within that site is agreed.

(iii) To agree that whilst site X would minimise the need for park and ride facilities, English Heritage be asked to consider a park and ride service for those visitors who wished to use it, from the final location chosen for the visitor facilities to a drop off point at the existing Stonehenge car park.

(iv) To raise no objection to the closure of the A303/A344 junction at Stonehenge Bottom, together with the closure of the A344 from Stonehenge Bottom to Byway 12 subject to junction improvements at the A303/A360 Longbarrow Roundabout and A360/A344/B3086 Airman's Corner.

(v) To advertise Traffic Regulation Orders under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 prohibiting motorised vehicles from using the A344 between Airman's Corner and Byway Amesbury 12 and byways within the World Heritage Site at the appropriate time.

(vi) To remind English Heritage of UNESCO's concern that no progress has been made with the implementation of the A303 Stonehenge Improvement, the need to find an appropriate solution compatible with the Outstanding Universal Value of Stonehenge and to ask for English Heritage's support to achieve the required improvements.

(vii) To send a copy of the Council response to the consultation to the Minister for Transport stressing the need to solve the problems of the A303 in the vicinity of Stonehenge, reluctantly accepting the closure of the A344 and stating the Council's intention to monitor the local road network for adverse effects.

Reason For Proposal

The Stonehenge WHS Management Plan needs to be revised to reflect changing circumstances. The present visitor facilities at Stonehenge are inadequate. New facilities would provide better interpretation of the WHS along with a café, a larger shop and improved visitor amenities. All the options for the site of the new facilities have advantages and disadvantages but on balance, the preferred options are those indicated.

The closure of the A303/A344 junction at Stonehenge Bottom and the A344 as far as Byway 12 would bring substantial improvements to the environment of Stonehenge and would reunite the monument with the ancient processional Avenue. The closure of the junction would also improve road safety, provided that improvements were made at the Longbarrow Roundabout and Airmen's Corner.