

## **Update to February 2022 State of Conservation Report – Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites World Heritage Site**

Following the email of 30 January 2023 inviting States Parties to provide updates to state of conservation (SOC) reports initially planned for the 45<sup>th</sup> session in 2022, the UK State Party is providing the Secretariat with updates regarding Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites (SOC report submitted on 01 February 2022).

The report below draws the World Heritage Centre's attention to, but does not repeat, information provided in the following subsequent notifications submitted to the World Heritage Centre:

- **Stonehenge Lintels – December 2022 (response to ICOMOS Technical Review April 2022)**
- **A303 Scheme – 30 May 2022**

The information is provided under the headings for the relevant section in the State of Conservation Report.

### **2. Response to the request from the World Heritage Committee**

#### Further Governance Review/Trust Transition Project Update

In the State of Conservation Report the State Party explained the primary objective of the Trust Transition Project, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The purpose is to find a more sustainable long-term funding solution to operate the Coordination Unit and WHS Partnership. A progress report is underway to the National Lottery Heritage Fund to enable the second tranche of their funding to be paid.

That funding will further explore how a new independent charitable trust could be established with enhanced potential to raise funds including for projects arising from the Management Plan. A number of important legal questions are currently being investigated. A new task and finish group, drawn from across the Partnership and chaired by the Independent Chair of the Partnership Panel, has also been agreed to explore the options for the model of any such trust.

Separately, discussions about potential additional funding from the English Heritage Trust and the National Trust, to complement that existing from Wiltshire Council and Historic England, are continuing.

The State Party will ensure that the World Heritage Centre is updated when further information is available.

#### Further Stonehenge and Avebury WHS Setting Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) Update

An initial draft report was prepared in May 2022, initially for internal consideration by Wiltshire Council. That internal discussion highlighted the need to align the document with the revised timetable of the Local Plan review and its policies which will now be ready for consultation in Autumn 2023.

The publication of UNESCO's new *Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context* has also prompted further review prior to consultation on

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the draft SPD. This is now due to be progressed in the early part of 2023 when an assessment of the new heritage impact assessment requirements has been completed by the consultants.

The draft will next be shared with the Project Board and the wider WHS Partnership. The timetable for public consultation and submission to the World Heritage Centre has therefore been adjusted to Autumn 2023, with the intention that the subsequent SPD would be adopted later that same year.

### Further Update on Wiltshire Council Local Plan

As indicated above, the timetable for the Wiltshire Council Local Plan review has been adjusted and consultation is now scheduled for Autumn 2023.

### Further Update on the Status of the A303 Stonehenge Scheme

In the State of Conservation Report submitted on 01 February 2022 the State Party confirmed that, subsequent to the quashing of the original decision on the scheme, the Development Consent Order (DCO) application could not proceed at that time. The report indicated that a process of redetermination had been commenced by the Secretary of State for the Department for Transport in November 2021 with publication of the Statement of Matters. This document set out the matters that would be considered as part of the redetermination process and how they would be handled.

Between November 2021 and September 2022 the Secretary of State issued a total of 7 consultations which covered a range of issues including carbon, baseline environmental information, and the assessment of impacts including outline heritage impact assessments for alternative routes comprising a bored tunnel extension and cut and cover tunnel extension. The consultations invited either the Applicant or the Interested Parties to provide written comments both on the matters highlighted for specific consideration, and the responses of other parties to those matters.

The State Party can confirm that the Final Report following the joint World Heritage Centre / ICOMOS / ICCROM Advisory Mission from 19-21 April 2022 was provided to the Secretary of State during this period of consultation. During [August](#) and [September](#) 2022 the Secretary of State invited comments on the findings and recommendations in the report firstly from the [Applicant](#) and subsequently from [other Interested Parties](#).

All the submissions as part of the redetermination are available on the Planning Inspectorate's [webpage](#). No further invitations for comment have been issued by the Secretary of State since the last submissions were published on 14 October 2022.

At the current time the Secretary of State for the Department for Transport is, therefore, still in the process of redetermining the Development Consent Order application. There is no set deadline within which the Secretary of State has to make a redetermination.

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The State Party will continue to ensure that the World Heritage Centre is kept updated in relation to the progress of the redetermination of the application and in how it is responding to the recommendations of the Advisory Mission.

### **3. Other current conservation issues identified by the State(s) Party(ies) which may have an impact on the property's Outstanding Universal Value**

#### **(e) World Heritage Site Condition Survey 2022**

At the time the last State of Conservation Report was submitted a planned condition survey of all archaeological monuments within the WHS had been delayed due to the pandemic and a consequent lack of tenders, but was due to be re-tendered.

The condition survey is now underway. Historic England commissioned Wessex Archaeology in May 2022 and the final project design was approved in July. The methodology includes the use of volunteers as well as professional staff. The initial stakeholder engagement and recruitment and training of volunteers has been completed, along with the data collection and review stage. The Wessex Archaeology project team and volunteers are starting the field work phase in February 2023, visiting monuments to examine and record conditions using a standard digital recording system.

The expected completion date of the final report is autumn 2023.

Below are some further notable areas related to the management of the property for the World Heritage Committee's information. These have been numbered sequentially to follow on from the information provided in the original report.

#### **(g) Grassland reversion**

In the State of Conservation Report the State Party provided an update in relation to how agri-environment schemes (f) were contributing to the protection of sensitive archaeological remains from damage through cultivation.

The State Party can now also report that in response to priority one of the Stonehenge & Avebury WHS Management Plan (2015) to *'Protect Buried archaeology from ploughing and enhance the setting of monuments by maintaining and extending permanent wildlife rich chalk grassland'* the National Trust has commenced a new phase of grassland reversion in the Stonehenge landscape. This project secures land use and management change over 168 hectares of land containing 61 archaeological sites, including a substantial part of the Stonehenge Avenue, Coneybury Henge, the Coneybury Anomaly, Neolithic burials and occupation sites, and numerous Bronze Age round barrows which were all under extreme risk of loss due to ploughing.

The National Trust has brought additional land under its direct care through the buy-out of the leasehold interest of an Agricultural Holdings Act (AHA) tenancy. This covered 151 hectares of land that the National Trust already owned, but did not have

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management control of, and a further 21 hectares of outright acquisition of freehold land known as Bow Tie Field.

Using seed harvested from the ancient chalk grasslands of Salisbury Plain, the capital works delivery is now underway to restore this land from intensive arable to species rich chalk grassland - protecting archaeological remains, enhancing the biodiversity and improving access for people.

### **(h) Erosion management**

The State Party reports that the effects of climate change - and warmer, wetter winters and unprecedented high temperatures in the summer of 2022 in particular - are evident across those areas of National Trust and English Heritage land that are most popular with visitors, both at Stonehenge and Avebury.

To protect the fragile and globally important monuments in its ownership, and minimise the damaging impacts of desire lines, the National Trust continues to encourage visitors to disperse across these landscapes. Heavily impacted areas are rested to aid surface recovery and prevent damage to underlying archaeological remains. As a proactive protective measure, the banks of Avebury Henge will be pre-emptively rested for a month in winter each year when the impacts of footfall are greatest. Similar measures are employed in the most vulnerable areas in the Stonehenge Landscape.

The English Heritage Trust has also been reviewing its landscape and conservation methodology following the gradual recovery of visitor numbers post-pandemic and the changes in weather patterns. Similar medium-term solutions as outlined above are being put in place. Following discussions with partners at the National Trust, Historic England and Wiltshire Council, English Heritage are researching a longer-term solution, more suitable for a wetter, warmer climate. This will continue to allow the people who want to visit Stonehenge from all over the world to do so knowing that the underlying archaeological remains are being protected.

### **(i) Avebury Papers**

Avebury is home to the *Alexander Keiller Museum*, the on-site archaeological museum for the Avebury part of the World Heritage Site. The State Party can also report that The National Trust is working in partnership with Bournemouth and York Universities to deliver [The Avebury Papers – Digitisation, exploration and creative re-use of a uniquely important archaeological archive](#). This ambitious and innovative project will digitise thousands of artefacts and documents in the archive, allowing virtual access to the collections for the first time. This multi-stakeholder project is funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council and will be transformational for the museum, providing unprecedented global access (Policy 5a/Action 103 of the WHS Management Plan).

**4. In conformity with Paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines, describe any potential major restorations, alterations and/or new construction(s)**

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**intended within the property, the buffer zone(s) and/or corridors or other areas, where such developments may affect the Outstanding Universal Value of the property, including authenticity and integrity**

### **Stonehenge Lintels (Application Reference S00241272) (CLT/WHC/EUR/21/13558)**

Subsequent to the submission of the State of Conservation Report the State Party provided further information to the World Heritage Centre on 16 December 2022. This responded to ICOMOS' Technical Review of the conservation works.

The State Party is aware that the English Heritage Trust will continue to monitor the conservation works annually in the future as part of ongoing maintenance.

### **Stonehenge Educational Centre Project**

In the State of Conservation Report the State Party informed the World Heritage Committee that the English Heritage Trust (EHT) had erected a temporary education building in 2021. The temporary building has already successfully allowed EHT to increase the capacity of their education offer at Stonehenge since this building has been in use, as education visits recover post-pandemic.

Since then discussions regarding a permanent solution for education at Stonehenge, including the enhancement of existing learning on Neolithic Life and enabling an innovative programme of STEM in heritage learning, are being progressed. These proposals are being discussed with the Local Authority, Historic England and key Partners in the World Heritage Site and will be shared with the World Heritage Centre and ICOMOS in Spring 2023 prior to wider consultation.

### **Conclusion**

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you have further questions regarding any aspect of this update to the State of Conservation Report submitted on 01 February 2022.

The State Party will continue to ensure that the World Heritage Centre is kept updated in a timely manner with any information relevant to the topics or projects discussed above. However, we appreciate that any information submitted subsequent to this will not be reviewed by the World Heritage Centre or the Advisory Bodies, in line with Decision 35 COM 12B, ahead of the World Heritage Committee's meeting in September this year.



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