NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The Proposed Scheme

Stonehenge is one of the most important and most frequently visited monuments in Britain. It is also an international icon, and attracts visitors from all over the world. However, the inadequacy of the existing visitor facilities and poor presentation of the site has been a concern for a long time, as has the setting of Stonehenge itself, confined by roads and the current existing visitor facilities. At the time of its inscription as a World Heritage Site (WHS) in 1986, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) World Heritage Committee asked for the closure of the A344. The Stonehenge Environmental Improvements Project is designed to address these concerns.

This document is a non-technical summary of the Environmental Statement that accompanies English Heritage’s Planning Application to Wiltshire Council for permission to implement proposals to deliver the Stonehenge Environmental Improvements Project. The aim of the Project set by Ministers is ‘to deliver, within the framework of the revised World Heritage Site (WHS) Management Plan 2009, environmental improvements including new visitor facilities and interpretation of the WHS, in keeping with Stonehenge’s status as a WHS, by 2012’. The objectives of the Project are to deliver:

- An improved landscape setting for Stonehenge;
- A new, sensitively designed and environmentally sustainable Stonehenge visitor centre; and
- Better interpretation of the Stones and the Stonehenge WHS.

The Scheme proposals comprise: construction of New Visitor Facilities on land adjacent to the existing A360/A344/B3086 road junction at Airman’s Corner and provision of a Visitor Transit System to provide access to the Stonehenge Monument along the route of the current A344 road; construction of a New Roundabout junction at Airman’s Corner, including realignment of the B3086 to its original (pre-1964) route where it joins the junction; decommissioning and removal of the Existing Visitor Facilities, including car parking, near the Stonehenge Monument leaving only a minimal Operations Facility and emergency toilets; and decommissioning and removal of the A344 road between Byway 12 and Stonehenge Bottom. The Project also involves improvements to the roundabout at Longbarrow Crossroads; and restricting motorised recreational vehicles on Byways within the WHS.

The Environmental Statement

The Environmental Statement sets out the findings of the Environmental Impact Assessment undertaken to identify the predicted effects of the Scheme on the area affected by the proposed development. It takes into account: mitigation measures proposed to avoid, reduce and, wherever possible, compensate for any potential significant adverse effects; and measures to enhance the beneficial effects of the Scheme. As part of the justification for the Scheme, the Environmental Statement also outlines the main alternatives considered. Particular emphasis has been given to designing out adverse impacts as an iterative part of the Scheme design and environmental assessment process.

Proactive and open consultations have been undertaken throughout the development of the Scheme with representatives of the local community, statutory bodies and other stakeholder groups to ensure that potential environmental issues of concern were taken into consideration in the design of the Scheme.
The Need for the Scheme

The United Kingdom ratified the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, 1972 (the ‘World Heritage Convention’) in 1984. The objective of the Convention is to define and conserve the world’s heritage, by drawing up a list of sites (the ‘World Heritage List’) whose outstanding values should be preserved for all humanity, ensuring their protection through a closer co-operation among nations. By ratifying the Convention, each country recognises its duty to ensure the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations of the cultural and natural sites of Outstanding Universal Value situated on its territory.

In 1986, Stonehenge, Avebury and Associates Sites (Site C373) was inscribed on the World Heritage List, one of the first to be inscribed in the UK. At that time, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee asked for the A344 road to be removed as soon as possible. Subsequently, the Committee has raised its concerns over the provision for visitors at Stonehenge and presentation of the WHS on a number of occasions.

It is widely acknowledged that existing refreshment, interpretative and parking facilities at Stonehenge are of basic design, insensitively located and inadequate for a WHS. Initially constructed forty years ago, increased visitor numbers have resulted in unplanned incremental development, principally the “temporary” ticket office and portacabin toilets that were added later. In 1993, the National Audit Office described the existing visitor facilities at Stonehenge as: ‘cramped, outdated and too small to deal with the 800,000 who visit the site each year’. These sentiments were echoed by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) UK in their 1995 The English World Heritage Sites Monitoring Reports, who added their concerns about the damage and disturbance to the setting of Stonehenge caused by the A303(T). In 1993, the Public Accounts Committee of the House of Commons described the presentation of the Site as a ‘national disgrace’.

Presently, the majority of visitors focus their visit, and their attention, on the Stonehenge Monument itself, with little appreciation of its important landscape context. First impressions of the WHS as a whole are poor due to the visual intrusion of the car park and related facilities, and traffic on the A344 and A303(T) roads which pass close to the Stonehenge Monument, severing it from the surrounding landscape.

Public awareness of access opportunities provided by The National Trust to the other archaeological sites and the wider landscape of the WHS is currently limited. Only a relatively small number of visitors experience views of the Stonehenge Monument in its wider landscape setting; the great majority do not have the opportunity to appreciate the important relationship between Stonehenge and the surrounding monuments.

Since the mid 1980s, English Heritage has examined a number of potential locations for a new visitor centre to replace the existing inadequate facilities adjacent to the Stonehenge Monument. These included a formal application by English Heritage and The National Trust for Outline Planning Permission in 1991 for a new visitor centre at Larkhill within the WHS. The application was refused by Salisbury District Council because of the unacceptable impact of the access road on the WHS. In the context of this decision, English Heritage began to search for other potential visitor centre sites. This led to the identification of Countess East as a potential site following a major public consultation exercise undertaken during 1992-3.
PROPOSED OVERALL MASTERPLAN FOR NEW VISITOR FACILITIES AND DECOMMISSIONING WORKS AT STONEHENGE
A planning application for the development of new visitor facilities for Stonehenge at Countess East was submitted to Salisbury District Council in August 2004, and planning permission was granted by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in March 2007 following a public inquiry.

In parallel with this, the Highways Agency had been developing proposals for road improvements at Stonehenge, including the closure of the A344 and a 2.1km bored tunnel to remove the A303(T) from within sight of the Stones. However, in December 2007, the Government announced that, while there were no acceptable alternatives to the A303(T) tunnel scheme, the cost would not represent best use of taxpayers’ money. As a result, the visitor centre could not go ahead, since planning permission was conditional on approval for the tunnel scheme.

In light of the decision on the A303(T), the Government made a commitment in December 2007 to work with stakeholders to review the WHS Management Plan as the overarching strategic document for the WHS, and to consider alternative options for New Visitor Facilities. Following a comprehensive site options appraisal and a public consultation in 2008, the Government announced in May 2009 that the visitor facilities for Stonehenge would be relocated to a new site away from the Stones at Airman’s Corner.

The Stonehenge World Heritage Site Management Plan 2009

The Stonehenge WHS Management Plan 2009 is the mechanism for delivery of UK responsibilities under the World Heritage Convention. It has been sent to UNESCO and endorsed by key stakeholders. The primary purpose of the Management Plan is to sustain the Outstanding Universal Value of the Stonehenge WHS to ensure the effective protection, conservation, presentation and transmission of the Site to present and future generations. The Government has made it clear that the Management Plan published in 2009 provides the framework within which the Project must be implemented. Government guidance in general says that relevant policies in a WHS Management Plan are key material considerations. Wiltshire Council endorsed this Plan in July 2009 as supplementary guidance and a material consideration in determining planning applications that affect the Stonehenge WHS, making it clear that it replaced the Management Plan of 2000.

The Project will help deliver the vision for the WHS set out in the Management Plan. It will enhance the visitor experience by providing improved visitor facilities and interpretation, and will assist in achieving a number of the Management Plan’s aims related to conservation of the WHS (Aim 3), sustainable tourism and visitor management (Aim 4), and sustainable traffic management and transportation (Aim 5). Specific policies of particular relevance to the Project include:

- Policy 3i – Where opportunities arise, the visual character of the WHS landscape should be improved by the removal or screening of existing intrusive structures;
- Policy 4f – Interpretation both on and off site should be improved to enhance enjoyment and appreciation of Stonehenge and the whole of the WHS;
- Policy 4j – Construct improved interim visitor facilities in keeping with the WHS by early 2012;
- Policy 5a – Measures should be identified and implemented to reduce the impacts of roads and traffic on the WHS and to improve road safety;
- Policy 5b – Proposals should be developed, assessed and implemented, if practical, for the closure of the A303(T)/A344 junction, of the A344 between the junction and the current visitor centre site, and for restricted access on some or all of the remainder of the A344 up to Airman’s Corner, depending on the location of new visitor facilities;
- Policy 5c – Vehicular access to Byways within the World Heritage Site should be restricted apart from access for emergency, operational and farm vehicles;
- Policy 5d – Measures should be taken through an exemplary Green Travel Plan to encourage access to the Site other than by car.
The Project has been designed to achieve these policies. It is also consistent with other aims and policies that need to be implemented to deliver the overall vision set by the Management Plan for the Site as a whole. This includes the ongoing reversion of arable land to grassland by The National Trust and other landowners in the WHS, designed to enhance the setting of the stone circle and other monuments, conserve archaeology, enhance nature conservation and, on National Trust land, improve accessibility to the wider landscape.

Alternatives

The environmental effects of a wide range of alternative sites and layouts for the new visitor facilities, options for the decommissioning of the existing visitor facilities, and options for the A344 closure and related highways improvements have been considered as an integral part of the development of the Project. English Heritage recognised that the need to carefully examine alternatives was essential in light of the environmental sensitivity of the WHS.

The Environmental Statement presents the results of a detailed appraisal of the main alternatives considered, and explains the process by which a site for the New Visitor Facilities has been chosen. In summary, the preferred options are considered to be an optimal response to the Stonehenge WHS Management Plan 2009 policies for conserving and enhancing the ‘Outstanding Universal Value’ of the WHS, while maximising opportunities for improved understanding and enjoyment for all visitors. The proposed New Visitor Facilities and access arrangements are considered to offer the best practical balance between:

- Minimising as far as practicable adverse impact on the WHS, its setting and on monuments that express attributes of its OUV. Although the Scheme would have some adverse effects in this regard, many of these impacts would be reversible.
- Minimising as far as practicable adverse impacts on the historic environment and ecology.
- The desire for direct and easy access to the Stonehenge Monument for all visitors with the priority to deliver an improved setting for the Stones and associated monuments.
- The need for new infrastructure and visitor traffic movements to avoid or minimise significant adverse historic environment, landscape, nature conservation and local community/traffic impacts.
- Achieving a high quality visitor experience in relation to varied opportunities for interpretation and engagement with the landscape provided by the Visitor Transit System route, Drop-off/Pick-up point locations and via existing opportunities for public access.
- Providing equality of experience for all visitors through assisted access options to the Stonehenge Monument, with the capacity to cater for the range of predicted visitor abilities and needs.

Planning Policy Appraisal

The provision of facilities for the management of visitors to Stonehenge is an established use within the World Heritage Site. The principle of developing new visitor facilities for Stonehenge is supported by adopted and emerging development plan policies and the underlying aims of the Regional Spatial Strategy’s tourism policies. The assessments of the Scheme on environmental resources and receptors set out in Sections 5.0 - 14.0 of the Environmental Statement reflect, as appropriate, the requirements of the range of relevant land use planning policies contained within the development plan, and the aims and polices of the Stonehenge WHS Management Plan 2009. The Environmental Statement demonstrates that due regard has also been given to meeting relevant International and European policy requirements, and that it is consistent with Government policy as set out in its current national planning policy guidance and statements.
PROPOSED NEW VISITORS FACILITIES
AT AIRMAN’S CORNER

PROPOSED LONGBARROW ROUNDABOUT IMPROVEMENTS
Key Environmental Effects of the Scheme

Archaeology & the Historic Environment

The Stonehenge WHS Management Plan 2009 is the framework for delivery of UK responsibilities under Article 4 of the World Heritage Convention. The primary purpose of the Management Plan is to sustain the Outstanding Universal Value of the Stonehenge WHS to ensure the effective protection, conservation, presentation and transmission of the WHS to present and future generations. The Scheme would provide substantial permanent benefits for the archaeology and the historic environment of the Stonehenge WHS, and would help sustain its Outstanding Universal Value. The Scheme would also be a major contribution to achieving the Management Plan's Vision for the WHS, delivering a number of specific priorities identified in the Plan. A comprehensive assessment of the impacts of the Scheme on individual monuments, archaeological sites and other historic environment resources, including the few historic buildings and historic aspects of the landscape, has been undertaken. Although the Scheme would have some adverse effects on some monuments expressing attributes of Outstanding Universal Value, notably on 3 barrows north of the Winterbourne Stoke group, many of these impacts would be reversible. On balance, taking into account the benefits of the proposed development in sustaining the Outstanding Universal Value of the Stonehenge WHS, the overall cumulative effect of the Scheme would have a large beneficial impact.

Landscape Character & Visual Amenity

Overall, the Scheme would have slight beneficial impacts on landscape character and quality, as well as for the visual amenity of recreational users. The assessment has demonstrated that restoration of the landscape to grass, combined with the closure of the A344 to motorised traffic, would achieve substantial benefits for the character and quality of the landscape around Stonehenge over a wide area. It would deliver similar benefits for the visual amenity of recreational users and those visiting the Stones, including improvements to the view of Stonehenge experienced by the many millions of people who see the monument from the westbound A303(T) every year. While careful siting, design and mitigation of the New Visitor Facilities at Airman's Corner has minimised their impact, there would be some significant localised adverse impacts on landscape character and quality, and on the visual amenity of recreational users. Landscape and visual impacts at Longbarrow Roundabout would not be significant. The use of modern lighting technology at both Airman's Corner and Longbarrow Roundabouts, combined with the removal of traffic from the A344, would result in slight beneficial effects to the night-time environment.

Nature Conservation & Biodiversity

Overall, the Scheme would have no significant adverse impacts on nature conservation and biodiversity. The assessment has demonstrated that the Scheme would have no significant adverse effects on the integrity of the River Avon Special Area of Conservation (SAC)/River Till Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or Salisbury Plain SAC/Special Protection Area/Ramsar/SSSI. The risk of adverse impacts on the River Till SSSI and River Avon SAC would be mitigated through careful construction methods set out in a Construction Environmental Management Plan, and by implementation of an Ecological Monitoring and Management Plan to guide sensitive ongoing management of the New Visitor Facilities site. Access by visitors to the World Heritage Site landscape would have no significant impacts on features of nature conservation value. Such access would be managed through a Visitor Management Strategy that would be designed to limit disturbance to ground nesting breeding birds, bat roosts, brown hare, calcareous grasslands and invertebrates. There would be no significant loss of existing calcareous grassland (along short sections of roadside verge), which would be limited compared to the much larger new areas of grassland that would be created.
Noise & Vibration

The Scheme would have no significant adverse noise and vibration impacts, and would have substantial permanent benefits for visitors to Stonehenge and rights of way users in the WHS. The assessment has demonstrated that there are no noise sensitive properties in the immediate vicinity of the Scheme proposals. Visitors and rights of way users would only be exposed to noise within acceptable levels when close to the site construction works and operations, and in the case of construction noise these effects would be temporary. In the vicinity of the A344 and Byways 11 and 12, including at Stonehenge itself, traffic noise levels would be reduced, which would be beneficial for improving the tranquillity of the landscape and enhancing the visitor experience, helping to meet part of the Vision of the Management Plan 2009 in relation to tranquillity.

Geology & Soils

The Scheme would have limited significant adverse impacts on geology and soils. The construction of the New Visitor Facilities involves limited excavation and filling works, and there would be minimal exporting of excavated material.

Water Quality, Drainage & Hydrology

The Scheme would have negligible or minor adverse impacts on water quality, drainage and hydrology. The assessment has demonstrated that on-site groundwater abstractions for drinking water and the proposed Ground Source Heating/Cooling system from the chalk aquifer would be limited, and that there would be no significant adverse effects on hydrology. The Scheme would have beneficial effects in that the New Visitor Facilities would be self-sufficient in terms of having its own water supply and own effluent treatment. In addition, as connection to the nearest treatment works would require laying of extensive new pipes, including some within the WHS, the proposed on-site treatment of foul drainage is considered to be beneficial in terms of avoiding potential impacts on archaeology. The assessment also demonstrates that the proposals for the management of surface water would provide appropriate mitigation of flood and pollution control risks during both construction and operation.

Air Quality & Emissions

The Scheme would have no significant adverse impacts on air quality for sensitive receptors, and there would be localised improvements in air quality at Stonehenge and along the A344 road corridor. The assessment has demonstrated that effects on air quality from dust and airborne particle emissions associated with construction, exhaust emissions following changes to traffic flows on the local highway network, and air pollutant emissions associated with building services at the New Visitor Centre would all be within recognised limits.

Agriculture

The Scheme would have no significant adverse impacts on agricultural resources. The assessment has demonstrated that 6.7ha of agricultural land would be lost to the construction of the New Visitor Facilities at Airman’s Corner for the life-time of the development. This includes 2.7ha classified as ‘best and most versatile agricultural land’ (sub-grade 3a), which would be a slight adverse impact. This loss would be partly off-set by the new agricultural land re-created in the vicinity of the Stones, extending to some 1.3ha. Two large agricultural holdings would be affected by the loss of this land: one extending to 890ha would lose 1.3ha; the other, which extends to 1,480ha, would lose 5.4ha. In both cases, the landowners have agreed to lease the land for the proposed development and these small losses are assessed as having a slight adverse impact in agricultural terms. There would be no significant impacts on the viability of agricultural businesses as a result of the Scheme’s operation.
Socio-Economic Effects

The Scheme would have no significant adverse impacts on socio-economic conditions. The assessment has demonstrated that during the construction phase, the Scheme would have a minor beneficial effect on the local economy. The operational effects of the Scheme are considered to be moderately beneficial to the local and regional economy. The New Visitor Facilities would play an important role for local schools and adult learning groups, with dedicated educational space available. The Scheme would also play a significant role for the wider region as a key visitor gateway and ‘hook’ to attract visitors to stay longer in Wiltshire, and in the South West region as a whole. These wider effects, which stem from the investment in the New Visitor Facilities, would be of major benefit for Wiltshire and the South West region, and contribute to sustaining and enhancing the region’s visitor economy.

Recreation

Overall, the Scheme would have slight beneficial impacts for recreational users. The assessment has demonstrated that the Scheme would have a major beneficial effect on the recreational amenity of most users of access routes (non-motorised users, including pedestrians/ramblers, cyclists and equestrians, and the large numbers of visitors to the WHS) by removing recreational motorised traffic, which is a priority identified in the WHS Management Plan 2009. This change would have a consequent major adverse impact on a relatively small number of motorised vehicle users of Byways within the WHS. During the construction phase, the Scheme would have some localised adverse impacts on access routes and the amenity of recreational users, but this impact would only be for the relatively short duration of the works.
Summary and Conclusions

In summary, the Scheme would deliver substantial environmental benefits for Stonehenge and the World Heritage Site. The assessment has demonstrated that the proposed removal of the A344 and existing visitor facilities at the Stones would provide a significantly improved landscape setting for Stonehenge, The Avenue and other monuments in the WHS that are affected by the current access arrangements. The Scheme would further improve the visitor experience through provision of better interpretation of the Stones and the Stonehenge WHS in the form of new exhibition and education facilities, and enhanced opportunities for access and interpretation in the wider landscape.

The New Visitor Facilities at Airman's Corner, which are not visible from most of the WHS including the Stones, would replace the existing facilities at Stonehenge with a higher quality and more environmentally sustainable development, sensitively designed to respect the environmental considerations of the proposed site. The New Visitor Facilities would minimise as far as practicable adverse impact on the WHS, its setting and the attributes of its Outstanding Universal Value; avoid adverse impacts on significant features of nature conservation interest, including internationally and nationally designated wildlife sites (the River Avon/Till and Salisbury Plain); minimise as far as practicable adverse impacts on the character of the landscape; avoid constraining future opportunities for improvements to the setting of Stonehenge and other monuments and sites in the WHS landscape as far as practicable; have negligible adverse impacts on local communities due to the site being remote from residential properties; make use of some land which has been previously disturbed by development; make use of land that has been demonstrated as having no significant archaeology above or below ground; and, make use of existing infrastructure so enabling new infrastructure (including access roads and transit routes) within the WHS to be minimised.

The environmental effects of a range of alternative sites for new visitor facilities have been considered. All the options involving the relocation of visitor facilities away from the current site would involve some form of infrastructure, and a degree of adverse environmental impact is to be expected given the environmental sensitivity of the WHS. Where some adverse environmental effects are unavoidable as a result of the Scheme, the assessment has demonstrated that these can be reduced, as far as practicable, through sensitive and sustainable design, and the provision of construction and operational mitigation measures. Of all the sites considered, Airman's Corner is considered to offer the best balance in terms of environmental impact, deliverability and visitor benefits. The New Visitor Facilities at Airman's Corner would not be visible from the Stonehenge Monument, and visual impacts on the setting of other monuments in the vicinity of the site would be minimised through the screening afforded by local topography and existing trees, enhanced by limited additional planting. The preferred options for the decommissioning of the existing visitor facilities and the A344, and the related highways junctions improvements, are considered to maximise potential environmental benefits and minimise adverse environmental effects. The proposed Visitor Transit System would provide assisted and direct access along the A344 to a point near to the Stones without creating significant new infrastructure in the landscape.

It is considered that the proposed mitigation measures set out in the Environmental Statement, together with the substantial benefits to the WHS as a whole - in terms of improvements to the setting of Stonehenge and other monuments, visitor facilities, access and presentation of the Site - would outweigh the disbenefits. These disbenefits do not have significant adverse effects on the Outstanding Universal Value of the WHS, nor on archaeological sites of national or international significance, and many of them would be reversible. The Scheme would also meet the concerns expressed by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee at the time of inscription and subsequently. Overall, the Scheme maximises achievement of the relevant aims and priorities of the Stonehenge WHS Management Plan 2009.
Opportunities to Comment

Hard copies of the full Environmental Statement will be deposited for public inspection during normal opening hours at a number of locations (see publicity material for details).

The Environmental Statement can also be viewed and downloaded via the Project website at:

www.stonehengevisitorcentre.org

Alternatively, hard copies of the Environmental Statement can be purchased from:

Stonehenge Environmental Improvements Project
FREEPOST
5th Floor, Holborn Gate
26 Southampton Buildings
London
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The Environmental Statement is priced as follows (inclusive of p&p):

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<td>Volume 1 – Text</td>
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A CD of the full Environmental Statement is also available at a cost of £10.00 (inclusive of p&p).

Copies of the Non-Technical Summary of the Environmental Statement are available free of charge from the above address.
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