

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- ES.1 The status of Stonehenge and Avebury as a World Heritage Site reflects their outstanding universal cultural and natural value. Stonehenge is also a world renowned tourist attraction. In order to cater for the needs of visitors, parking, refreshment and limited interpretative facilities are currently provided close to the monument. However, it is widely agreed that the present facilities are inadequate and are of an inappropriate quality for a World Heritage Site. The close proximity of the A303 and the A344 roads to the Stones creates visual and noise impacts which further detract from the local environment.
- ES.2 The Stonehenge Master Plan has been prepared by English Heritage and the National Trust (working closely with the DCMS and the DETR and other party organisations) with the overall aim of returning Stonehenge to a setting and environment worthy of its status as a World Heritage Site and to restore Stonehenge's isolation and natural dignity. This will be achieved by removing the noise and sight of the traffic in the area by placing the A303 in a 2km cut-and-cover tunnel, closing the A344 and re-creating a natural chalk downland setting. In addition, the existing Stonehenge facilities will be removed and a new Visitor Centre with associated ancillary catering and retail facilities will be built outside the World Heritage Site. A Stonehenge World Heritage Site Management Plan is in preparation and will provide a framework within which management decisions can be taken on a whole spectrum of issues over time. It represents the strategic framework within which the Master Plan is evolving.
- ES.3 This Planning Brief represents supplementary planning guidance, prepared in a hierarchy of planning policy, to guide an application (or applications) for the development of a new Visitor Centre for Stonehenge by a private sector commercial operator at Countess Road East, Amesbury. It supersedes an earlier Planning Brief endorsed by both Salisbury District and Wiltshire County Councils in September 1996 which also identified Countess Road East site as the preferred development option for a new Visitor Centre.

- ES.4 The new Visitor Centre will provide high quality reception and interpretative facilities for the understanding and enjoyment of the World Heritage Site for UK and overseas visitors. The new centre will be designed in accordance with good environmental practice guidelines, with state-of-the-art interpretative facilities to help promote knowledge and appreciation of the monuments within the landscape. The associated facilities will include ancillary catering and retailing for use by visitors to the centre. Parking is to be concentrated at the new Visitor Centre. A free, environmentally acceptable and sustainable transport link between the new centre and the viewing/drop off point(s) is to be provided. Those who wish to walk from the new Visitor Centre, or from any other direction, utilising public transport links will be encouraged to do so.
- ES.5 The Planning Brief also sets out specific planning criteria which the development of the new Visitor Centre and associated facilities will be expected to meet. The criteria provide the context for the preparation of a planning application (or applications) and have been identified by reference to the development plan policies of Salisbury District Council and Wiltshire County Council, central Government guidance and detailed evaluations of the environment, landscape, archaeology, highway network, access routes and economy of the Stonehenge area.
- ES.6 The Planning Brief also provides guidance on the format of any future planning application (or applications) by a commercial operator for a new, high quality Visitor Centre and environmentally sustainable transport link. The planning application, which is anticipated to be submitted in Summer 2000, will be accompanied by detailed supporting information including a Traffic Impact Assessment and an Environmental Impact Assessment.