

## Section 1 Introduction

- 1.1 This Planning Brief has been prepared on behalf of English Heritage and the National Trust (in conjunction with Salisbury District Council and Wiltshire County Council) as a framework document to guide a planning application (or applications) for the development of a new Visitor Centre for Stonehenge at Countess Road East, Amesbury. It does not oblige Salisbury District Council to grant a planning permission.
- 1.2 The Brief has been prepared in accordance with national, regional, strategic and local planning policies and should also be considered in association with the Stonehenge World Heritage Site Management Plan and the Stonehenge Master Plan, which sets out the Government's vision for Stonehenge.
- 1.3 The Master Plan delivers the improvements to the A303, including a Winterbourne Stoke bypass, that have been long sought by Salisbury District Council and Wiltshire County Council and these works are dependent upon the new Visitor Centre and its associated financial contribution from heritage sources. The Visitor Centre therefore forms an integral part of the future land uses in this locality.
- 1.4 This Brief supersedes a Planning Brief prepared on behalf of English Heritage and the National Trust and endorsed by both Salisbury District and Wiltshire County Councils in September 1996. The earlier Brief was prepared as a framework document to guide the development of a new visitor centre at Stonehenge and the implementation of a major landscape restoration project called the Stonehenge Millennium Park. The Millennium Park project comprised three elements:
- a) the provision of a new Visitor Centre and associated facilities;

- b) provision of an environmentally acceptable and sustainable transport link to Stonehenge; and
- c) environmental restoration.

1.5 The September 1996 Planning Brief identified the Countess Road East site as the preferred development option for a new Visitor Centre and established detailed criteria against which any proposal would have been assessed.

1.6 In 1993 English Heritage carried out the largest ever public consultation on a heritage matter. 100,000 leaflets were distributed which described and compared eight optional new sites for a Visitor Centre. Each of the following sites for a Visitor Centre have been thoroughly considered to support a new Visitor Centre and the Countess Road East site is the most suitable in the context of the various land uses and policies in the locality. Additional information on the assessment of the various sites is set out at Appendix 7. The Countess Road East location is also supported by archaeologists and conservationists because it is outside the WHS and has little archaeological significance.

- Larkhill was the public's preferred choice but was rejected due to fierce opposition by the archaeological community. It required a new access road and car park to be constructed within the WHS and would be visually intrusive. There was local opposition to Visitor Centre traffic passing through residential areas, including Countess Road. The location was also commercially unattractive and would have required substantial investment from the public purse.
- New King Barrows and Fargo South were the preferred options of Amesbury Town Councillors but rejected for similar reasons.
- Fargo North was later considered in April 1998 but rejected as it also required substantial development within the WHS.

- Countess West, which has recently become subject to a conditional contract of purchase by the National Trust, was unpopular due to the access problems, detrimental impact of congestion on the residents of Countess Road and because it lies within the World Heritage Site and alteration of the listed buildings and structures to accommodate a Visitor Centre would be problematic.

1.7 In July 1998, approval was given by the Government for the dualling and partial tunnelling of the A303 at a cost of £125m. The scheme was approved as an Exceptional Environmental Scheme with part funding coming from heritage sources via DCMS. Additional public funds are not available for the scheme. It was also realised that a commercial Visitor Centre could raise the heritage contribution for the A303 improvements. Therefore, the conclusion reached by the Secretary of State was that the Visitor Centre should be positioned at the least archaeologically sensitive, and most commercially viable location at Countess East.

1.8 The Stonehenge Millennium Park concept has not been progressed. Whilst the broad principles established by the former Planning Brief remain relevant, it has been agreed with Salisbury District Council and Wiltshire County Council that the Brief should be up-dated and amended to take into account material changes in circumstances that have taken place in the interim. The updating of the 1996 Planning Brief will take place in close liaison with a number of parties including the National Trust, Salisbury District Council, Wiltshire County Council and the Highways Agency.

1.9 The Countess Road East site is edged red on Plan DTZ 1 for identification purposes and measures approximately 28 hectares (70 acres) in extent. English Heritage owns the freehold of parts of the site and has a conditional contract to purchase the remaining land from a private owner. Under the agreement, the vendors will complete the transfer to English Heritage if planning permission is granted.

- 1.10 Stonehenge is at the centre of a World Heritage Site of 1,600 hectares (4,000 acres), containing over 450 Scheduled Ancient Monuments. The Stones and the 5 hectares (13 acres) of land in its immediate vicinity were placed in the guardianship of the Ministry of Public Works in 1918, followed by the Department of the Environment and, most recently, English Heritage in 1984. The National Trust owns 600 hectares (1,500 acres) of the surrounding land, comprising nearly half of the Stonehenge World Heritage Site while the remainder of the Stonehenge World Heritage Site is owned by the Ministry of Defence or is in private ownership.
- 1.11 Together, English Heritage and the National Trust are committed to restoring and protecting the World Heritage Site by removing the noise and sight of traffic in the area by placing the A303 in a 2 km “*cut-and-cover*” tunnel, closing the A344 and re-creating a natural chalk downland setting, thereby enhancing conditions for bio-diversity. In addition, the existing Stonehenge facilities will be removed and a new Visitor Centre with ancillary catering and retail facilities will be built outside the World Heritage Site. This will help reduce visual intrusion within the World Heritage Site.
- 1.12 The site selection procedure and the envisaged format of the new Visitor Centre are set out in Appendix 2 (and 7) and Section 7 respectively, whilst Sections 5 and 6 discuss planning policies and development considerations.
- 1.13 The specific planning criteria which development proposals for the new Visitor Centre and associated facilities will be expected to meet are contained in Section 7. These criteria will provide the context for the preparation of a planning application (or applications) in due course. The criteria have been identified by reference to the development plan policies of Salisbury District Council and Wiltshire County Council and detailed evaluations of the environment, landscape, archaeology, highway network, access routes and economy of the Stonehenge area. Section 8 provides,

guidance on the format of any future planning application (or applications).

- 1.14 The consultation timetable for this Planning Brief within the context of the Stonehenge Management Plan is set out in the table on the following page.

<b>STONEHENGE PLANNING BRIEF CONSULTATION TIMETABLE</b>	
<b>Date</b>	<b>Planning Brief</b>
August 16-28 1999	Submit Pre-Consultation Draft Brief to SDC
August, September and October 1999	Public consultation period
October 21 1999	Report comments and updated Brief to SDC's Northern Area Planning Committee
October 22 – October 26 1999	Up-date Brief to incorporate comments
October 27 1999	Report up-dated Brief to special meeting of full Planning Committee for endorsement
December 15 1999	Report up-dated Brief to Wiltshire County Council's Environment and Transport Committee for endorsement.
January, February and March 2000	Operator uses Brief to guide planning application