

Section 4 Countess Road East, Amesbury

- 4.1 The Countess Road East site is located approximately 3.5km to the east of the Stonehenge monument. It is situated at the junction of the A303 (T) and the A345 Countess Road, to the rear of the existing Countess Service Area (see Plan DTZ 1 at Appendix 1). The site extends to some 28 ha (70 acres) in total and comprises agricultural land which is mostly classified by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food as Grade 3, with the part of the site closest to the River Avon being Grade 4. The land edged yellow on Plan DTZ 1 will not be included in the lease to the commercial operator, although it may be made available for related highway works, or for some form of community benefit.
- 4.2 The site is bounded to the east by the River Avon, to the west by residential uses on Countess Road and to the north by the Totterdown Clump area of woodland. The existing Countess Service Area which provides a “*Shell*” petrol filling station, a “*Little Chef/Burger King*” restaurant and a Travelodge hotel is situated at the south west corner of the site, while the A303 (T) defines the remainder of the southern boundary.
- 4.3 The new Visitor Centre will be located at the southern end of the site with areas of open space remaining to the north. Much of the northern part of the site is sloping and affected by planning constraints (refer to paragraphs 39-40 of Appendix 4 of this document). Therefore, any proposal for built development on this part of the site will need to be carefully and sensitively considered. The eastern most part of the site forms part of the River Avon corridor and, accordingly, proposals will be required to respect this and safeguard nature conservation and ecological interests of importance.

The Current Proposal

4.4 The successful bidder will be appointed to design, build, finance and operate the new Visitor Centre which will replace the current inadequate facilities. As a minimum requirement, proposals will be expected to provide the following:-

- an imaginative “*Visitor Experience*” for the presentation and interpretation of Stonehenge and its monumental landscape;
- a tourist information centre providing full information on the attractions of Wiltshire and the South-West;
- the use of “*state of the art*” technology eg, virtual reality;
- an education and resource centre;
- a range of ancillary catering outlets including fast food, restaurants and other beverage outlets;
- a range of ancillary retail facilities;
- an outlet for English Heritage and the National Trust to sell membership;
- toilets and related amenities (eg, baby change facilities) sufficient to cater for visitors at all times;
- a first aid area;
- management and administration offices;

- a childrens play area;
- enhanced public transport links and drop-off facilities;
- a car, coach and cycle park providing sufficient spaces to meet visitor requirements;
- an environmentally sensitive and sustainable transport link which will take visitors from the Visitor Centre to and from the viewing / drop-off point(s) and take people with disabilities from the viewing / drop-off point(s) to the Stone Circle, including the provision of covered bus stops for local buses and cycle racks/storage;
- all new buildings constructed will be encouraged to comply with high standards of environmental specification;
- any development on the Countess Road East site for a new Visitor Centre should have regard to the nature and amenity of the immediate surrounding land uses. In particular, the existing residential area to the west of the site fronting Countess Road is highly sensitive and appropriate mitigation and environmental measures will be required to ensure that residential amenities are safeguarded;
- development proposals will be required to treat the eastern boundary of the site, adjacent to the River Avon corridor and AHEV, carefully and with sensitivity.

4.5 Other ancillary uses or facilities proposed as part of the new Visitor Centre may be appropriate but will be considered on their individual merits against development plan policy and national planning guidance. Retail uses which

are not ancillary to the Visitor Centre should not be sought.

- 4.6 All the facilities will need to be fully accessible to visitors with disabilities, as required by the Disability Discrimination Act, 1995.

Planning History

- 4.7 In the past, the Countess Road East site has been the subject of other proposals for development. For example, subsequent to the construction of the Countess Service Area, an outline application (ref S/93/0094/TP) for a CRS foodstore and associated car parking on the site was submitted in January 1993 by Co-Operative Retail Services Limited. The application proposed a foodstore of 2,787sq.m (30,000sq.ft) gross with 324 car parking spaces. Access was proposed via the existing slip road from the A303 to the Countess Service Area and egress via the existing exit onto Countess Road. This would have necessitated installing traffic signals on the roundabout and the alteration of the egress onto Countess Road to prevent right turning traffic.
- 4.8 This application was refused planning permission in November 1993 by Salisbury District Council as contrary to retail policy at a national and strategic level. Specifically, it was felt that the foodstore would undermine the vitality and the viability of Amesbury Town Centre and would encourage the use of the private car at the expense of the other forms of transport. An appeal was lodged against this decision but was dismissed. A further appeal to the High Court was also unsuccessful.