

## Section 6 Development Considerations

6.1 Whilst this Brief has been formulated to guide the development of a new visitor centre complex for Stonehenge at Countess Road East, the framework for broader development proposals over a wider area embodied in the Stonehenge Master Plan provides the important context.

### Archaeology

6.2 As mentioned earlier in this Brief, the Countess Road East site (and, indeed, much of Salisbury District) is defined as lying within an Area of Special Archaeological Significance. PPG16 “*Archaeology and Planning*” and the relevant development plan policies make it clear that development proposals should not adversely affect any important archaeological features. Evaluations within the World Heritage Site have already been undertaken by the English Heritage Central Archaeological Service and Wessex Archaeology. This report identifies the location of archaeological features and the constraints to development that these pose.

6.3 The Countess Road East site lies outside the World Heritage Site. The geophysical investigations and archaeological evaluations undertaken to date indicate that the new Visitor Centre site does not appear to contain any significant remains requiring preservation in situ. A summary of the results of the 1994 archaeological evaluations is included as Appendix 6. However, in accordance with guidance in PPG16 there may be a requirement to undertake further evaluation as detailed plans are developed. If important features are discovered, the Local Planning Authority may require preservation of the remains in situ, or alternatively, a programme of archaeological excavation.

6.4 Research indicates that the archaeological sites at Fargo North are confined

to the higher ground north and south of the area west of the Cursus. The transport link between Countess Road East and the drop-off point(s) will need to minimise the impact on the archaeological landscape. An Environmental Impact Assessment will accompany any planning application and it will include an archaeological assessment and mitigation strategy addressing these issues.

### **Landscape and Environment**

- 6.5 An assessment of landscape quality within the World Heritage Site was undertaken in 1995. Copies of this report are available from English Heritage. The report identifies and discusses in detail the landscape constraints and opportunities affecting the World Heritage Site and provides a base line against which proposed changes can be assessed.
- 6.6 A key component of the Stonehenge Master Plan is the removal of the sight and noise of traffic from the landscape and environment of the Stonehenge Bowl. This will allow the unification of Stonehenge with its setting, reversion to the natural chalk down landscape and give rise to improved conditions for bio-diversity.
- 6.7 Specifically in relation to Countess Road East, it has been described by officers at the District Council as one of the few “*open countryside*” sites in the District which does not lie within the AONB or the Special Landscape Area. This notwithstanding, the Visitor Centre proposals will be required to make a positive contribution to environmental quality in the area, particularly with regard to the site’s relationship to the River Avon AHEV.
- 6.8 This site is also relatively well screened by trees and the submitted proposals will be expected to demonstrate how these will be retained wherever possible together in the context of overall landscaping proposals for the site.

### **Economic Development Strategy**

- 6.9 Tourism, as recognised in development plan policies, has a key role in the economic development strategies of both Wiltshire County Council and Salisbury District Council as a significant generator of both expenditure and employment. The Amesbury Vision Statement (Spring 1999) describes a 45% growth in visitor numbers for the year ending September 1998 and recognises the potential of the new Visitor Centre at Countess Road East to create a sustainable transport link to the town centre, encouraging visitors to explore Amesbury and other surrounding settlements and make a longer-term impact on the local economy (p.10).
- 6.10 Stonehenge is a visitor attraction of international repute and clearly has a primary role to play in the future development of tourism in the local area. Therefore, it will be important to ensure that the Stonehenge Master Plan proposals and the new Visitor Centre are fully integrated with the wider tourism and economic development strategies of the relevant local authorities. In particular, the proposals will be expected to provide a tourist information centre providing full information on the attractions of Wiltshire and the South-West.
- 6.11 The Wiltshire Tourism Strategy prepared for the Wiltshire Economic Partnership includes the following objectives:
- To develop a strong identity for Wiltshire and its facilities.
  - To promote excellence and a high quality product to which tourists will wish to return.
  - To increase the length of stay and spend of visitors to Wiltshire.

- To increase occupancy in existing accommodation and visitor numbers at existing visitor attractions.

6.12 The development should seek to maximise local employment and training opportunities.

### **Site Access and Traffic Generation**

6.13 Vehicular access to the new Visitor Centre at Countess Road East will be via a slip road off the eastbound carriageway of the A303, east of Countess Roundabout. Vehicles will exit the site via the A345 (Countess Road) with a left turn only. There is a possibility of shared access arrangements with “Granada”, who own and operate the Countess Services Area. Discussions are currently taking place between Granada and English Heritage.

6.14 Provision will also be made for safe and commodious access both to and within the site, linked to public transport, for pedestrians, the mobility impaired and cyclists.

6.15 The Highways Agency’s analyses shows that the A303 (T) is already at full capacity and is unsatisfactory. Without improvement the situation is predicted to deteriorate. A fundamental element of the Stonehenge Master Plan is the tranche of road improvements announced in the Government’s Targeted Programme of Improvements in July 1998 as “*An Exceptional Environmental Scheme*”. This is the catalyst for the new Visitor Centre at Countess Road East.

### **Improvements to the A303 (T) and Closure of the A344**

6.16 Any planning application for the new Visitor Centre will need to be accompanied by a Traffic Impact Assessment. This will need to

demonstrate that the scale and nature of the development proposed can be satisfactorily accommodated on the local highway network. A preliminary Traffic Assessment carried out by consultant highway engineers on behalf of English Heritage has indicated that the existing roundabout at Countess East is under strain at peak times and has insufficient capacity to accommodate the new Visitor Centre traffic. It indicates that the appropriate interim solution is the partial signalisation of the existing roundabout with minor changes to the roundabout geometry prior to a grade separated junction as part of the A303 improvements. English Heritage wish to work with the Local Planning Authority, Highway Authority and Highways Agency to agree a traffic solution which provides a long term solution that overcomes any uncertainty on the traffic capacity of Countess Roundabout.

- 6.17 Moreover, it is a requirement to provide an efficient, environmentally sensitive and sustainable transport link from the new Visitor Centre at Countess Road East to the viewing/drop-off point(s). Walking to the Stones from Countess Road East and elsewhere will be encouraged and special arrangements will be made from the viewing / drop-off point(s) for the elderly and people with disabilities.

#### **Ancillary Catering and Retail Development**

- 6.18 Initial feasibility studies undertaken on behalf of English Heritage and the National Trust have identified that ancillary catering and retail uses to the new Visitor Centre will be important both in terms of the provision of a high quality visitor experience and also to support in financial terms the principal heritage elements of the Visitor Centre.
- 6.19 Local and national planning policies aim to restrict retail development in countryside and out-of-centre locations generally. Therefore, as explained in paragraph 5.5 of this Brief, the scale and format of any proposed ancillary

retail development at the Stonehenge Visitor Centre will need to be carefully considered against appropriate development plan policies. Any proposal for retail development above an ancillary level will be accompanied by a Retail Impact Assessment and Sequential Test Report.

### **River Avon**

6.20 It will be necessary to consult English Nature, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and the Environment Agency (Wessex Region) in respect of development on the Countess Road East site to ensure that development proposals do not have an adverse impact on the River Avon or its tributaries.

6.21 In particular, the development proposals and the construction process will be required to comply with the Environment Agency's "*Best Practice*" guidelines contained in its "*Pollution Prevention Guidelines*", "*Sustainable Urban Drainage Guidelines*" and other similar publications.

### **Environmental Statement**

6.22 The DDWSP states that significant development proposals affecting World Heritage Sites will generally require formal environmental assessment to ensure that their immediate impact and their implications for the longer term are fully evaluated. This reflects the requirements of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999.

6.23 Schedule 3 to the Regulations sets out criteria for determining whether or not an EIA is required for a development. These criteria encompass the characteristics of the development (such as its size and polluting nature); the location of the development and characteristics of the potential impact of the development. In general, an EIA will be needed in three types of cases,

namely:

- for major developments of more than local importance;
- for developments which are proposed for particularly environmentally sensitive or vulnerable locations; and
- for developments with unusually complex and potentially hazardous environmental effects.

6.24 In view of the fact that the new Visitor Centre is an integral part of the Stonehenge Management Plan (which includes the removal of traffic from the area by the use of a 2km tunnel), it is a reasonable requirement for an EIA to accompany an application.

6.25 The scope of the EIA will need to be discussed and agreed with the Local Planning Authority. It is likely to require, however, a description of the likely effects on flora, fauna, soil, the cultural heritage, the use of natural resources, the emission of pollutants, the creation of nuisance and the elimination of waste. In particular, the EIA will be required to provide appropriate mitigation and environmental measures to ensure residential amenity is safeguarded. This will be required to be considered within a sustainable framework. Extensive work has already been carried out concerning the archaeology, ecology and landscape of both the World Heritage Site and Countess Road East.

6.26 As referred to earlier at paragraph 5.8, the Habitats Regulations (Regulation 48) will require an appropriate assessment to be carried out of any project that could leave a significant impact on the internationally important interests of SAC's and cSAC's.