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World Heritage Centre
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Your Ref
Our Ref

28 January 2011

Dear Francesco

STATE OF CONSERVATION OF STONEHENGE, AVEBURY AND ASSOCIATED SITES (UNITED KINGDOM) (C373)

I refer to the World Heritage Committee's Decision 33 COM 7B.129 following examination of the state of conservation of Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites World Heritage property (WHP) at its 33rd session (Seville, Spain, 22-30 June, 2009).

In accordance with paragraph 5 of Decision 33 COM 7B.129, I am pleased to submit to the World Heritage Centre a report on the state of conservation the property, using the indicative format, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 35th session in June of this year.

1 Response from the State Party to the World Heritage Committee's Decision, paragraph by paragraph

[Note: this information has to refer to developments over the past year or since the last decision of the Committee for this property]

Decision: 33COM 7B.129

The World Heritage Committee,

1. *Having examined Document WHC-09/33.COM/7B,*
2. *Recalling Decision 32 COM 7B.114, adopted at its 32nd session (Quebec City, 2008),*
3. *Regrets that the State Party continues to make little progress in the urgent resolution of the significant A344 road closures and visitor facility issues at the property, despite assurances made as long ago as 1986;*

The UK cannot accept that th State Party continues to make little progress on this issue. As the Committee will know from previous reports to the World Heritage Centre (31st January 2009, 19th May 2009, 19th October 2009 and 1st February 2010), significant

progress has been made in recent years. Stonehenge is one of our most important World Heritage properties and we remain committed to working with English Heritage and others to improve the setting of this important monument and to its ongoing protection and conservation.

The UK Government considers that delivery of the present scheme (the Stonehenge Environmental Improvements Project (SEIP)) which is being taken forward by a partnership led by English Heritage would fulfil UNESCO's requirements for the conservation of this World Heritage property. This £27m scheme includes the building of new visitor facilities with enhanced exhibition and education space at Airman's Corner, 1.5 miles west of Stonehenge, and the closure of the A344 which runs immediately adjacent to the monument. There will be significant improvements to Stonehenge's landscape setting, with the stone circle finally being able to reconnect with its ancient processional Avenue.

A business case for the project has been approved by Government and, subject to securing the necessary funding, it is anticipated that the project will be completed in 2013.

Background

In December 2007 the government made a commitment to work with key stakeholders to (i) review the Management Plan for the WHP as the over-arching strategic document for the site; and (ii) to consider alternative options for new visitor facilities (including the case for closing the A344), that did not involve any diversion of the A303(T). A new Stonehenge Project Board, chaired jointly by the then Minister for Culture and Minister for Transport, was set up to oversee these two initiatives.

In response to the first part of this government directive, English Heritage, working closely with key stakeholders, reviewed the WHP Management Plan on behalf of the Stonehenge World Heritage Site Committee. Following extensive public consultation a new Management Plan was published in January 2009 and sent to the World Heritage Centre on 31st January 2009. The 2009 Management Plan has been agreed by key stakeholders as the framework guiding future management and decision-making within the Stonehenge WHP. In July 2009, the plan was endorsed by Wiltshire Council as supplementary guidance and a material consideration in determining planning applications that affect the Stonehenge WHP

In response to the second part of the directive, the government established a Project Implementation Group, chaired by English Heritage, to take forward the new SEIP. The aim of the SEIP is to deliver, within the framework of the Management Plan 2009, environmental improvements including new visitor facilities and interpretation of the WHP, in keeping with Stonehenge's status as a WHS. It was proposed by the Project Implementation Group (and agreed by the Stonehenge Project Board) that these improvements should be secured through two initiatives:

- The improvement or relocation of the visitor facilities and parking, with better interpretation of the Stonehenge WHS;

- The closure of the A344 where it runs adjacent to the Stones.

Fulfilling these two objectives would also allow improvement of access to the WHS, and traffic regulation orders would also be sought to remove motorised vehicles from other public rights of way within the property.

4. *Requests that the State Party keeps the World Heritage Centre informed of any progress, particularly the Ministerial announcement, as it occurs;*

Noted.

5. *Also requests the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by 1 February 2011 a report on progress made on the road closure and visitor facilities, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 35th session in 2011.*

In October 2009 English Heritage submitted a Full Planning Application for the new visitor centre and associated works to Wiltshire Council to secure elements of the SEIP. The proposals contained in the planning application were designed to ensure that other aims and objectives of the WHP Management Plan would not be frustrated and could be pursued independently at a later date subject to funding availability. The Application reference number is S/2009/1527 (Full Planning Application for New Visitor Centre and Decommissioning Works).

The planning application scheme includes the following elements:

- The new visitor centre, parking and associated facilities at Airman's Corner (about 2.5km west of the Stonehenge monument);
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- The removal of the existing visitor facilities and parking at the Stones, with retention of a small security hub and emergency visitor toilets (landscaped to appear as below ground level and minimise visual impact);
- The stopping up and grassing over of the A344 between Stonehenge Bottom and Byway 12 (subject to a separate stopping up order);
- The realignment, closure and planting of a section of the B3086 North of Airman's Corner;
- The replacement of the current staggered crossroads at Airman's Corner with a roundabout.

Full planning permission was granted by Wiltshire Council on 23rd June 2010.

Wiltshire Council, the local highways authority, has advertised a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to ban vehicles (with some exceptions) on the A344 between Airman's Corner and Byway 12 and on other rights of way within the WHS. Because of the number of objections to the TRO, Wiltshire Council has elected to hold a public inquiry, probably in the early part of 2011.

As part of the SEIP the Highways Agency made a commitment to undertake improvements at Longbarrow roundabout and works to the A303(T) carriageway at Stonehenge Bottom, both of which are required as a result of stopping up the A344. The Highways Agency remains committed to these works, and supportive of the proposed Section 247 Order, in principle, subject to confirmation of the necessary funding..

Following the granting of planning permission, English Heritage prepared applications for stopping up part of the A344 near Stonehenge and part of the B3086 at Airman's Corner. These applications are made to the Secretary of State for Transport under the provision of Section 247 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. These applications have now been subject to public consultation and the government are considering whether or not a public inquiry is needed, only four objections having been received. If an inquiry is required, it will be held in tandem with the public inquiry into the TRO.

Subject to satisfactory outcomes for the remaining statutory consent procedures, as outlined above, it is hoped that construction will commence early in 2012 with completion and the opening of the new Visitor Centre expected in July 2013. While the government is no longer able to commit public funding to the scheme, it has approved proposals for an alternative funding strategy by English heritage to raise the £27million required for the project. English Heritage has recently secured a grant of £10 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund towards the cost of the project.

Other current conservation issues identified by the State Party

[Note: conservation issues which are not mentioned in the Decision of the World Heritage Committee or any information request from the World Heritage Centre]

There are currently no other major conservation issues within the World Heritage property. English Heritage have recently commissioned a condition survey of known archaeological sites within the property which will update previous condition surveys and provide a revised baseline for assessment of the condition of the property for the next round of Periodic Reporting. Natural England are carrying out a survey of the impact of burrowing animals on the World Heritage property. English Heritage have also commissioned further work on the research framework for the property

Culture Division

In conformity with paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines*, please describe any potential major restorations, alterations and/or new construction(s) within the protected area and its buffer zone and/or corridors that might be envisaged.

None beyond those described above

Please let me know if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Marsden".

Peter Marsden
Head of World Heritage

Cc HE Matthew Sudders, UK Permanent Delegate to UNESCO
UK National Commission for UNESCO
ICOMOS, Paris