

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990
TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT (INQUIRIES PROCEDURE)
RULES 2000

APPEAL REF. APP/T31915/A/05/1193511

Appeal by English Heritage

**LAND TO THE EAST AND WEST OF COUNTESS ROAD, AMESBURY,
SALISBURY**

Application Ref. S/2004/0001

SUMMARY PROOF OF EVIDENCE

SA/2/4/1 summary

by

**Andy Norfolk DipLA, MSc, MLI
Chartered Landscape Architect**

on

Landscape and Visual Impacts

on behalf of

THE STONEHENGE ALLIANCE

November 2006

1 Introduction

- 1.1 I am Andy Norfolk, a Chartered Landscape Architect. I have a Diploma in Landscape Architecture, an MSc in Landscape Ecology, Design and Maintenance and I have been a Member of the Landscape Institute since 1984.
- 1.2 My experience has included a wide range of work for various employers in the public and private sectors. Since 1994 I have been running my own practice which is registered with the Landscape Institute
- 1.3 I have prepared this evidence on behalf of ASLaN as part of the Stonehenge Alliance.
- 1.4 This evidence focuses on landscape, visual and spiritual issues.

2 The Site and Proposed Visitor Centre Scheme

- 2.1 The site is the Stonehenge World Heritage Site (WHS), which is described in detail by the Stonehenge WHS Management Plan (WHSMP), the Visitor Centre site at Countess East and the link between it and the WHS.
- 2.2 Most of the scheme in the WHS is in a “Special Landscape Area” of high landscape quality.
- 2.3 The WHS lies within the “Salisbury Plain and West Wiltshire Downs Character Area” defined by the Countryside Agency (Countryside Character Volume 8: South West). Its “Key Characteristics” include
 - *Outstanding prehistoric ritual landscape with widespread earthworks and monuments prominent in an open landscape, especially Stonehenge.*
- 2.4 This Character Area “*is an upland grazing country, with spacious far horizons. The long and round barrows and dykes, commonly sited prominently on the low ridges, give a very special sense of an ancient landscape which is nowhere greater than in the views of Stonehenge across the open downs.*” The importance of the atmosphere of this landscape in giving a “*very special sense of an ancient landscape*” should be noted.

- 2.5 According to the Environmental Statement the Visitor Centre scheme is *“In line with the objectives of the WHS Management Plan”*.

3 The Planning Application Refusal and Planning Context

- 3.1 Salisbury District Council refused planning permission for the proposed Stonehenge Visitor Centre because the applicants did not supply enough information on the land train transit system and did not show that it would not have adverse impacts on the WHS and local residents and because it relies on the A303 Stonehenge Improvement which is now unlikely to proceed.
- 3.2 The original objections made by Salisbury District Council are still valid and no significant new evidence has been submitted to demonstrate that they have been, or can be, overcome. The scheme as it presently exists is contrary to a number of planning policies and objectives of the WHS Management Plan (WHSMP).

4 Principles and the Landscape and Visual Amenity Assessment

- 4.1 The method used for the assessment of landscape and visual impacts has not followed the guidelines in Landscape Institute/Institute of Environmental Assessment Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (2nd Edition 2002), and the Countryside Agency/Scottish Natural Heritage Landscape Character Assessment Guidelines (2002) in important respects, which reduces its reliability.
- 4.2 There has been no incorporation into the landscape characterisation or the assessment of landscape and visual impacts of
- the inter-relationship between important factors
 - the views of important groups of stakeholders
 - the intention to make more of the WHS open access grassland
 - intangible but important aspects of landscape character
 - a historical perspective of the “time-depth” of the WHS
 - sensitivity of different user groups.
- 4.3 Failure to follow these guidelines has lessened the reliability of the landscape characterisation, assessment of sensitivity of landscape character areas and the sensitivity of “visual receptors”, and the assessment of impacts which means that Part 6 of the Environmental Statement is seriously flawed.

5 Site Factors and the Landscape and Visual Amenity Assessment

- 5.1 Because the A303 Stonehenge Improvement is now unlikely to proceed the present Visitor Centre scheme is fatally flawed.
- 5.2 There is inadequate description of the land train, its route and the associated shelters to allow an accurate assessment of their impacts.

- 5.3 The land trains will have headlights and probably internal lighting. The landscape and visual impacts of the lighting requirements of the land trains **have** not been taken into account.
- 5.4 Protective gates, fencing and other operational safety measures will be part of the land train transit system. The visual impacts of these fences have not been considered in the ES.
- 5.5 There is confusion about how frequently the land trains will run, or how frequently they will pass any point in the landscape. These vehicle movements will attract the eye in a way that static features of the proposals will not, so this is important.
- 5.6 Insufficient detail is supplied on the construction detail for the shelters to allow a reliable assessment of their impacts.
- 5.7 No assessment of the impacts of the King Barrow Ridge shelter appears to have been carried out.
- 5.8 Adding over-sized bus shelters and frequent land trains to the landscape will seriously undermine attempts to provide a more appropriate landscape setting for monuments within the WHS.
- 5.9 Visitors who do not choose to enter the WHS via the land train transit system but explore this area on foot or by bicycle will be more sensitive to the presence of the land trains and shelters.
- 5.10 The form and impacts of the shelters which **are** probably required for the electric wheel chairs should have been included in the ES.
- 5.11 Landscape impacts have been understated for example for the sections of the land train route “*Countess Road to ‘Strangways Junction’ and ‘Strangways Junction’ to King Barrow Ridge Drop-off*”, which *should* be upgraded to a **moderate adverse impact**.
- 5.12 On the land train route within the WHS from the Countess underpass to Strangways at peak times there will always be at least one land train in view at all times during the peak period. There may be similar underestimates of the period of visibility of land trains on other sections of its route.
- 5.13 The impact of the land train crossing the King Barrow Ridge between the drop off and Strangways Junction has been understated. This landscape impact should be regarded as not merely moderate adverse but **major adverse**.
- 5.14 The visual impacts on people walking in the vicinity of the land train route have been understated.
- 5.15 Part 5.0 “Archaeology & The Historic Environment” of the ES overstates some benefits or claims them unjustifiably. For example in 5.4.2 removal of trees and a byway from some monuments is said to offset adverse impacts of the land train route when such conservation work should be done anyway.

- 5.16 Planting in the vicinity of the Cursus to screen the land train route has acknowledged adverse archaeological impacts and is contrary to Objective 13 of the WHSMP.
- 5.17 The land train route shelter and turn around would be visible from three of the Old King Barrows. This intrusion of modern clutter into the setting of important monuments is directly contrary to Objective 9 of the Management Plan.

6 Conclusions

- 6.1 The reasons for which Salisbury District Council refused the application for planning permission for the Visitor Centre scheme are still valid and have not been mitigated. The land train system has not been described in adequate detail. There is no certainty that the A303 Stonehenge Improvement will proceed, nor what form any improvements to the Countess road junction might take.
- 6.2 The proposed development does not meet some objectives of the WHSMP. For example, the setting of the Cursus and its long barrow would not be improved and new modern clutter would be introduced into the WHS landscape.
- 6.3 The ES is defective in its handling of landscape characterisation and landscape and visual impacts.
- 6.4 The scheme is fatally compromised by the uncertainty over the A303 improvements, is not fully described or designed in critical respects, and the ES is inadequate and misleading on landscape and visual impacts. This appeal should fail.