

Throughout the 20th century the improvement of the surroundings of Stonehenge has been on the agenda. In recent years it has become the object of a smouldering dispute which might, without care, burst into acrimonious flames: Stonehenge is even more important to even more people than were Twyford Down or the Newbury Bypass.

Improvement is needed for three reasons:

1. There has to be a Management Plan agreed with ICOMOS for this World Heritage Site;

2. The existing Visitor Centre, with its grubby car park, tiny shop and loos, and the Stones fenced, is a national disgrace;

and

3. The only undualled stretch of the A303, a main road to the South West of England, runs right by the Stones and across miles of ritual landscape and latent archaeology. Danger and delay have arisen.

Further problems come from the large area of Ministry of Defence land to the North, and from Larkhill village, which does not want several hundred thousand visitors' worth of traffic passing through. Another road, the A344, important to local people and running even closer to the Stones, has to be closed. The only possible sites for the Visitor Centre are at Countess Roundabout, to the East, where a busy North-South road crosses the A303 and a flyover is the only answer. Another village, Winterbourne Stoke, has been promised a bypass, even though it has nothing to do with the Stonehenge problems.

The main battlefield is between the Government (the Departments of Culture, Media and Sport, and of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, and the Treasury) - not completely unready to fund A303 “improvement”, but for financial reasons backing a 2 kilometre cut-and-cover tunnel on the line of the existing A303; and, facing them, a large swathe of informed people and organisations who back a longer bored tunnel (LBT), the better to preserve and restore the archaeology, the loneliness, the silence, and the mighty effect of the landscape. The cut-and-cover tunnel, they believe, would ruin precisely those qualities for which Stonehenge was nominated a World Heritage Site.

The three requirements - WHS Management Plan, Visitor Centre, and better road – intertwine and interact. A factual chronology with minimum comment may show how.

1986: The British Government’s proposal that Stonehenge and its surrounding landscape and monuments become a World Heritage Site under the relevant International Convention is accepted by UNESCO. A dual site, it comprises Stonehenge and the complex of sites at Avebury, some 20 miles away: “Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites”. The “unparalleled landscape” is mentioned as well as the neolithic monuments, and HMG internationally commits itself to their protection.

1991: English Heritage (which manages the Stones, given to the nation in 1918) and the National Trust (which owns adjacent land bought by public

subscription in the 1920s) jointly seek outline planning permission for a new Visitors' Centre at Larkhill; it would have a new access road from the A344 through Fargo Plantation from the West. Salisbury District Council rejects the application because of its impact on landscape and archaeology (particularly the prehistoric Cursus). An appeal is lodged, then withdrawn.

1992: An architectural competition for a Visitors' Centre at Larkhill is won by Edward Cullinan, designer of the Visitors' Centre at Fountains Abbey WHS: prize-winning but fiercely criticized in the on-site Visitors' book. A second, detailed, application is made for the Larkhill site, objected to, and withdrawn. A re-examination of eight possible sites begins.

1993 April: As possible routes for a dualled A303 at Stonehenge, the Highways Agency advances a Northern Route, a Southern Route and two on-line options: of the last, one has, and one has not a short cut-and-cover tunnel. After public consultation, all are rejected.

1993: Public consultation on the proposed sites for a Visitors' Centre. Larkhill is preferred by the general public but Countess East is chosen by English Heritage and the National Trust as least damaging to the landscape and archaeology and providing ample space for development. ("Countess" is Countess Farm by the eponymous roundabout East of Stonehenge: sites on the East and the West sides of it had been listed.)

1993: Public Accounts Committee of the House of Commons calls Stonehenge "presentation" (i.e. the present car park and Visitors' Centre) a "national disgrace".

1994, July 8th: English Heritage mounts a major International Conference

on Stonehenge: the Great Debate. (Sir) Angus Stirling, Director General of the National Trust, ringingly commits both the Trust and English Heritage to “a long bored tunnel”. Here are his words:

“The first principle underlying all our joint discussions in recent years has been a total commitment, on the part of the Trust and English Heritage, to find a solution to restore, and to maintain thereafter, the unity of Stonehenge and its natural, unsullied setting.

“We have concluded that the only feasible on-line route [for the A303] which meets the essential requirements of this World Heritage Site, is a long bored tunnel starting East of New King Barrows and finishing to the West well past the monument, that is the restoration to its grand and natural setting that is the National Trust’s and English Heritage’s duty.

“There is no historic site in England where we shall uphold that duty with greater resolve and determination.”

1995: The Long Bored Tunnel (LBT) is again endorsed by consensus at a Highways Agency A303 Planning Conference in November. The obvious funding problems are left for a next Government to face.

1995: Messrs Mott McDonald estimate the cost of an LBT at £300.2 million; Messrs Halcrow at £292.2 million. These estimates remain the foundation for all later statements that the LBT is “unaffordable and uneconomic”. (But see January 2000.)

1995: Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 15 on Planning and the Historic Environment, published by the Department of the Environment, requires

Planning Authorities to give “material consideration” to World Heritage Site status: this is the only specific reference to World Heritage Site status in, or beside, planning law. (PPGs are what they say: official guidance, not injunctions.)

1996: The new Director General of the National Trust, Martin Drury, confirms Sir Angus Stirling’s commitment: “the Trust will not budge over protecting Stonehenge” (*The Guardian*, January 31).

1997 January: A 'POSTnote' on Tunnelling is published by the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, proposing an improved system of cost-benefit analysis when archaeological, scientific, landscape and transport interests are in conflict, as at an imaginary site called “Twyburyhenge” - a combination of Twyford Down, Newbury and Stonehenge, where conflict had erupted between the Department of Transport and concerned citizens.

1997 April: The then Government spokesman, Baroness Trumpington, writes to Lord Kennet that World Heritage status is merely “honorific”. At the time, the Department of Transport’s Advisory Document on roads still stated, despite the Government’s commitment to the World Heritage Convention, that WHS Status had no standing in Planning Law.

1997 May: New Government.

1997: June: English Heritage and Tussauds Group application to the Millennium Fund under the Private Finance Initiative for a Visitors’ Centre at Countess East and related car-parking development is turned down.

1997 September 27th: The Code of Practice of the European Association

of Archaeologists is approved at Ravenna. Articles 1.7 and 2.6. are relevant. (HMG has not yet ratified the related 1992 European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage.)

1997 October: English Heritage mounts a Conference on World Heritage Sites at which British practice in regard to World Heritage Sites is politely castigated by Dr. von Droste, then the Director of UNESCO's World Heritage Centre. And Chris Smith, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, announces that a Management Plan for Stonehenge is to be developed, as required by UK's commitments under the World Heritage Convention. (At this time, a major effort is being directed to the excellent Management Plan for Maritime Greenwich as a new UK World Heritage Site.) The Stonehenge Management Plan Working Party, however, does not start work until December 1998.

1997 November: A ministerial meeting (according to Halcrow 1998) decides the LBT is "unaffordable and uneconomic", and instructs English Heritage to produce new proposals.

1997 November: A full year before the Management Plan Working Party first meets, Chris Smith once again announces the Visitors' Centre is to be at Larkhill, the Ministry of Defence having agreed to reconsider earlier

objections. But the same local and archaeological objections remain insuperable: the proposal is once again discarded.

At some point both Halcrows, for the Highways Agency, and the Centre for Social and Economic Research on the Global Environment (CSERGE), for English Heritage, are commissioned to produce Reports. The first is an Environmental Assessment of four road options (including two earlier rejected, but excluding the EH / NT and consensus-preferred LBT). CSERGE's is on the Heritage Value of Stonehenge. Both report in 1998.

1998: DETR publishes Policy Appraisal and the Environment, with an Environmental Appraisal Checklist of 9 points, presumably to be observed by all Government Departments and Agencies.

Item 1: What does the policy or programme aim to achieve?

Item 2: What impacts will the various options have on the environment at home and abroad? Consider both direct and indirect costs and benefits.

Item 3: How significant are the impacts?

Item 4: What method will be used to value the costs and benefits?

Item 5: What is the preferred option and why?

Item 6: What arrangements are in place for effective monitoring and evaluation? What data will be needed and when?

Item 7: How will the appraisal be publicised?

Coming from DETR this document, which addresses the problem of "non-monetarisable" values, marks a significant change of priorities.

1998 Spring: CSERGE report completed. It gives Stonehenge a £300

million “heritage value”, apparently for Britons alone. Its value as a World Heritage Site or to “foreigners” is not mentioned. The Report surfaces briefly, but is apparently shelved. Among its findings appeared to be a definite preference, among those it enquired of, for “no change” rather than the cut-and-cover tunnel. This preference was not among the “options”, but can be deduced from the figures.

1998 April: Chris Smith’s Larkhill proposals are withdrawn and he proposes Fargo North for the Visitor Centre.

1998 June: The Halcrow Report is completed and presented, but it is not in the public domain nor even made available to all members of the Stonehenge Management Plan Working Party when that is finally appointed and meets. (It is understood that Salisbury District Council and Wiltshire County Council at some point had received copies.) In September 1999 it is placed in the House of Lords Library. The Report contains one-page *résumés* of findings on each option; that on the 2-km. cut-and-cover twin tunnels does not reflect the findings reported in the full text, but it may be all that Ministers saw. What the Report found was:

That 10 hectares of WHS land would be newly taken for the 3.5 kilometres of new dualling of the A303 outside the cut-and-cover tunnels (but within the WHS).

11 hectares in theory would be returned to grass, but there has to be a road of sorts for “non-A road traffic” (horses, bicycles, etc.) presumably on or near the existing line of the A303.

There would be 4-500 metre approach cuttings at each end of the cut and cover tunnel or tunnels.

The two or four portals would be large and disfiguring.

There would be permanent lighting of the tunnels, visible at either end day and night.

There would still be noise and pollution.

There would be a new, undisguisable, 200 by 150 metre hump of unstated height covering the tunnels, in Stonehenge Bottom in direct view of the Stones.

In dry weather the 2-Km tunnel scars could show.

Only the landscape in the immediate “amphitheatre” would be improved, not the landscape of the Stonehenge “bowl”, let alone that of the whole World Heritage Site.

No estimate is provided for the costs of the several years of disruption during the proposed works.

1998 July 24th: Letter from Chris Smith, Minister for ??? to Lord Kennet (C98/04816/10624): after mentioning “the need for a degree of compromise if we are to find a way forward for Stonehenge” (without elaborating), he writes:

“I would not wish English Heritage to press ahead with proposals for new visitor facilities - nor would they wish to - before all the relevant issues have been fully considered and satisfactory solutions have been found. It is essential that arrangements for visiting the site must be environmentally and archaeologically sustainable”.

1998 July: An A303 improvement scheme is announced by the DETR as an “exceptional environmental scheme”. It includes a by-pass for the village of Winterbourne Stoke, which Halcrow, and others earlier, had advised should be dealt with separately, not as part of the Stonehenge road plan. The scheme includes the on-line dualling scheme through the World Heritage Site that was rejected by consensus at the 1994 and '95 Conferences, two kilometres of it in cut-and-cover twin tunnels at the centre of the World Heritage Site. These intrusions can be “sensitively” treated at the design stage.

1998 September: Chris Smith announces a Stonehenge Master Plan, even though the Stonehenge Management Plan Working Party has still not met. The Master Plan is endorsed by English Heritage and by National Trust officials. Public consultations are not known to have taken place, and the membership of the National Trust had not been informed although National Trust land is involved.

1998 November 23rd: A DCMS official writes to David Part, Chairman of the Wiltshire Archaeology and Natural History Society (WANHS):

“The fact that the tunnel would result in the loss of five scheduled monuments is of course regrettable...”.

He appears unaware of the Halcrow list of permanent damage to the WHS, (available from June 1998) and refers to “sensitive” implementation.

1998 December: First meeting of Stonehenge Management Plan Working Group, including representatives of local organisations, statutory bodies and landowners. Despite requests, including formal written ones, no

critical discussion of the Master Plan is permitted in this group by Lady Gass, its English Heritage Chairman, while the Management Plan is being drawn up by the Working Party. Major issues are thus largely excluded from discussion because they are deemed to have been already dealt with by the Master Plan. This contradicts Lord McIntosh's Parliamentary Answer to a House of Lords question (HL 5404):

The Stonehenge World Heritage Management Plan ... provides the overarching framework within which the Stonehenge Master Plan will be implemented.

1999 January: Highways Agency consultation (mainly local) on the A303 improvement scheme, including the Winterbourne Stoke by-pass. Unfortunately the Consultation Document is so devised that indications of support for the by-pass could not but simultaneously indicate support for the 2 km cut-and-cover tunnel. This consultation has since been quoted as proving public support for the 2 km cut-and-cover tunnel.

1999 Spring: English Heritage, seeking an operator for the intended new Visitors' Centre, advertises it as a

“major international commercial opportunity”

in the Property pages of the *International Herald Tribune*. The Management Working Group had not yet reported, but it is claimed that bidders have been “informed” of the Management Plan. In its agents' (massive) documentation, English Heritage stated that “the Visitors' Centre will be the Gateway to the Stonehenge World Heritage Site”: it was to be a “grand project of the highest prestige” in the “tradition of the Propylaea to the Parthenon and the Queen's House at Greenwich”. English Heritage also appears both to guarantee the operator's

commercial success, and to pledge itself to support the operator's planning applications, etc., for the proposed 70 acre site at Countess East. These pledges were apparently later withdrawn.

1999 April: Lord Whitty, Minister for Roads, in a letter to Lord Kennet (W/10418/99) says there will be an Environmental Assessment for the A 303 Stonehenge scheme, as required by both EU and national environmental legislation.

1999 July: A well-attended meeting, called at the Society of Antiquaries by "Rescue - the Trust for British Archaeology", votes by a large majority (one against, a few abstentions) against the cut-and-cover tunnels. At the meeting, Geoff Wainwright, English Heritage's Chief Archaeologist, says that the short-list of applicants for the Visitors' Centre operation would be announced in September 1999. (No short-list was ever announced.)

1999 August 2nd: It is announced that bids to operate the Visitor Centre have been received. There is no mention in the Press Release that the winning bid would have to be compatible with and governed by the Management Plan, which then was not even in draft.

1999 September 6th: Draft Management Plan exhibited and sent out for consultation: replies due in October. (The English Heritage Press Release distinguishes between "Stonehenge" and its "setting" and implies this distinction will be accepted in the Management Plan.)

1999 October: English Heritage brief for Supplementary Planning Guidance by Salisbury District Council (SDC) outlines its plans for a major commercial development at Countess East as a Visitors' Centre: among other things a "range of catering outlets including fast food

restaurants and other beverage outlets”and “a range of retail outlets”, and yet more “outlets” than these would be “decided on [their] merits”. The brief for the SDC Planning Committee stated that the Master Plan, not the Management Plan, is the governing policy: this contradicts earlier announcements.

Local residents form a Group to express alarm at the traffic consequences; at the excessive scale of a commercial development outside the WHS (the Countess East site is larger than the Countess West site, within the WHS, which the residents would prefer); and at the uncertain economic and environmental viability of an explicitly commercial Visitors’ Centre. They notice that the Visitors’ Centre Brief contains no safeguards on timing. If planning permission for a Visitors’ Centre were given before the roads are agreed, they will be faced with a *fait accompli*: the details of timing in the October 13th Master Plan Newsletter are confusing. Confusion also remains over an implied suggestion that the operator would contribute to the “heritage” cost of the new road schemes, roundabouts, flyovers, etc. The operator also appears to be promised a monopoly of car-parking throughout the whole Stonehenge area; which would presumably have to be enforced by the Wiltshire Police.

The scale and overall sustainability of a “world class”, “international commercial opportunity” -type Visitors’ Centre, and its possible consequences for the World Heritage Site itself, were not discussed by the Management Plan Working Party. But the new English Heritage proposal was incompatible with Chris Smith’s expectation that the Visitors’ Centre would be “essentially educational” (Letter: November 3rd 1999).

1999 Autumn: A “pledge” to the local residents in EH’s Master Plan Newsletter (Autumn 1999) that the Visitors’ Centre at Countess East would not open before the road improvements (including a flyover at the

Countess roundabout) were in place and the A344 beside Stonehenge was closed, which would only be when the Master Plan's first cut-and-cover tunnel at Stonehenge Bottom was complete and in operation. Not an easy-to-work-out timescale. Nor was it clear what the chosen operator would do in the meantime with the present Visitors' Centre and Car Park, which remain a "national disgrace".

1999 December: "Heart of Neolithic Orkney" accepted by UNESCO as a new UK World Heritage Site.

1999 December: final draft of the Management Plan presented to Chris Smith. It is widely welcomed, because it recognises, as the Master Plan did not, that "Stonehenge" consists of the whole World Heritage Site (not simply a "core" immediately round the Henge) situated in a less important "setting" where dualling roads, altering the landscape, setting up permanently-lit tunnel portals, etc., might by "sensitive implementation" somehow be converted from vandalism to the acceptable.

During 1999, "Seahenge" was dismantled without proper advance explanation, and to public alarm; a "Stonehenge" at Miami was saved; and the Leaning Tower of Pisa was described by Professor Tarabella of Pisa University (Times, December 6), as "an Italian Stonehenge". Throughout 1998 and 1999, Messrs AT&T used Stonehenge in massive photographic advertisements on the back of the world-wide *International Herald Tribune* and in airports.

2000 January: A new poster using Stonehenge appeared all over London and in the British press advertising another hi-tech communications firm.

Six bodies, including leading archaeological and environmental organisations, write to the Times voicing their alarm and suggesting that

Stonehenge be placed on UNESCO's List of World Heritage in Danger. The Chairmen of English Heritage and the National Trust, responding to this letter, admit that the current proposals for a cut-and-cover tunnel represent a "compromise" but do not say who or what with, nor why they have resiled from their earlier public commitments.

During January 2000, press stories claimed the Visitors' Centre decision was imminent; silence continued.

2000 February 24th: ICOMOS UK – the British arms of ICOMOS, to which the Government submitted its Stonehenge Management Plan for approval issues a "position statement on Stonehenge": ICOMOS UK supports, in principle, the general approach, subject to further evaluation of the details, and to a full Environmental Impact Assessment, which would be expected to form part of the Planning Process. The alternatives, including the long bored tunnel, would need to be assessed in equal terms.

2000 April: The Stonehenge World Heritage Site Management Plan is published, with none of the fanfare and celebration that had accompanied the many ill-fated announcements of earlier years.

The document has many merits: chiefly that it is in no doubt that "Stonehenge" is the whole World Heritage Site and that this is the area entitled to the

"protection, conservation, presentation, and transmission to future generations"

for which we are internationally committed by the World Heritage Convention. So it looks to be solving the first of the Stonehenge problems and highlights the faults of the Master Plan, elements of which

would indeed cause irretrievable damage.

As for the second problem, it is put on ice.

2000 July 10th: English Heritage's new Chairman, Sir Neil Cossons, announces that the whole expensive search for a commercial operator for the Visitors' Centre has failed. It has not, fortunately, been recognised as a "major international commercial opportunity". Instead, English Heritage are to "explore... opportunities...for a more hands-on role in [its] operation..." which they will put out for public consultation in 2002.

Remain the roads. The Highways Agency announced, also on July 10th 2000, that the Countess Roundabout Flyover was accepted and planned for, as part of the Master Plan's £130 million A303 Improvement - on-line 2 km cut-and-cover tunnels and all.

But now the local authorities are showing interest in a new "Southern Route", proposed by Colonel Parker. And the always unreasonable hope - whose was it? - that ICOMOS might ignore the road issue if it liked the rest of the Management Plan has been scotched by ICOMOS UK's February 24th Position Statement: re-examination of all the road options is now required, including the Long Bored Tunnel. And while a figure of an extra £100 million for the LBT has often been mentioned, a new figure has appeared from a Highways Agency spokesman: only £40 million more than cut-and-cover [NCE ROADS REVIEW, 22 June 2000, p XX] (although this figure has since been stated to have been mistaken).

Perhaps the old consensus of the middle nineties is re-emerging? It would be very welcome, and save a great deal of trouble.