

Draft retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (C 373 bis)

Brief Synthesis

The Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites World Heritage Property is internationally important for its complexes of outstanding prehistoric monuments. Stonehenge is the most architecturally sophisticated prehistoric stone circle in the world, while Avebury is the largest. Together with inter-related monuments, and their associated landscapes, they demonstrate Neolithic and Bronze Age ceremonial and mortuary practices resulting from around 2000 years of continuous use and monument building between c. 3700 and 1600 BC. As such they represent a unique embodiment of our collective heritage.

The World Heritage Property comprises two areas of chalkland in southern Britain within which complexes of Neolithic and Bronze Age ceremonial and funerary monuments and associated sites were built. Each area contains a focal stone circle and henge and many other major monuments. At Stonehenge these include the Avenue, the Cursuses, Durrington Walls, Woodhenge, and the densest concentration of burial mounds in Britain. At Avebury they include Windmill Hill, the West Kennet Long Barrow, the Sanctuary, Silbury Hill, the West Kennet and Beckhampton Avenues, the West Kennet Palisaded Enclosures, and important barrows.

Stonehenge is one of the most impressive prehistoric megalithic monuments in the world on account of the sheer size of its megaliths, the sophistication of its concentric plan and architectural design, the shaping of the stones - uniquely both Wiltshire Sarsen sandstone and Pembroke Bluestone - and the precision with which it was built.

At Avebury, the massive Henge, containing the largest prehistoric stone circle in the world, and Silbury Hill, the largest prehistoric mound in Europe, demonstrate the outstanding engineering skills which were used to create masterpieces of earthen and megalithic architecture.

There is an exceptional survival of prehistoric monuments and sites within the World Heritage Site including settlements, burial grounds, and large constructions of earth and stone. Today, together with their settings, they form landscapes without parallel. These complexes would have been of major significance to those who created them, as is apparent by the huge investment of time and effort they represent. They provide an insight into the mortuary and ceremonial practices of the period, and are evidence of prehistoric technology, architecture and astronomy. The careful siting of monuments in relation to the landscape helps us to further understand the Neolithic and Bronze Age.

Criteria

Criterion (i):

The monuments of the Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites World Heritage Site demonstrate outstanding creative and technological achievements in prehistoric times.

Stonehenge is the most architecturally sophisticated prehistoric stone circle in the world. It is unrivalled in its design and unique engineering, featuring huge horizontal stone lintels capping the outer circle and the trilithons, locked together by carefully shaped joints. It is distinguished by the unique use of two different kinds of stones (Bluestones and Sarsens), their size (the largest weighing over 40t) and the distance they were transported (up to 240km). The sheer scale of some of the surrounding monuments is also remarkable: the Stonehenge Cursus and the Avenue

are both about 3km long, while Durrington Walls is the largest known henge in Britain, around 500m in diameter, demonstrating the ability of prehistoric peoples to conceive, design and construct features of great size and complexity.

Avebury prehistoric stone circle is the largest in the world. The encircling henge consists of a huge bank and ditch 1.3km in circumference, within which 180 local, unshaped standing stones formed the large outer and two smaller inner circles. Leading from two of its four entrances, the West Kennet and Beckhampton Avenues of parallel standing stones still connect it with other monuments in the landscape. Another outstanding monument, Silbury Hill, is the largest prehistoric mound in Europe. Built around 2400 BC, it stands 39.5m high and comprises half a million tonnes of chalk. The purpose of this imposing, skilfully engineered monument remains obscure.

Criterion (ii):

The World Heritage Site provides an outstanding illustration of the evolution of monument construction and of the continual use and shaping of the landscape over more than 2000 years, from the early Neolithic to the Bronze Age. The monuments and landscape have had an unwavering influence on architects, artists, historians and archaeologists, and still retain a huge potential for future research.

The megalithic and earthen monuments of the World Heritage Site demonstrate the shaping of the landscape through monument building for around 2000 years from circa 3700 BC, reflecting the importance and wide influence of both areas.

Since the 12th century when Stonehenge was considered one of the wonders of the world by the chroniclers Henry de Huntington and Geoffrey de Monmouth, the Stonehenge and Avebury Sites have excited curiosity and been the subject of study and speculation. Since early investigations by John Aubrey (1626-1697), Inigo Jones (1573-1652), and William Stukeley (1687-1765), they have had an unwavering influence on architects, archaeologists, artists and historians. The two parts of the World Heritage Site provide an excellent opportunity for further research.

Today, the Site has spiritual associations for some.

Criterion (iii):

The complexes of monuments at Stonehenge and Avebury provide an exceptional insight into the funerary and ceremonial practices in Britain in the Neolithic and Bronze Age. Together with their settings and associated sites, they form landscapes without parallel.

The design, position and inter-relationship of the monuments and sites are evidence of a wealthy and highly organised prehistoric society able to impose its concepts on the environment. An outstanding example is the alignment of the Stonehenge Avenue (probably a processional route) and Stonehenge stone circle on the axis of the midsummer sunrise and midwinter sunset, indicating their ceremonial and astronomical character. At Avebury the length and size of some of the features such as the West Kennet Avenue, which connects the Henge to the Sanctuary over 2km away, are further evidence of this.

A profound insight into the changing mortuary culture of the periods is provided by the use of Stonehenge as a cremation cemetery, by the West Kennet Long Barrow, the largest known Neolithic stone-chambered collective tomb in southern England, and by the hundreds of other burial sites illustrating evolving funerary rites.

Integrity

The boundaries of the Property capture the attributes that together convey Outstanding Universal Value at Stonehenge and Avebury. They contain the major Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments that exemplify the creative genius and technological skills for which the Property is inscribed. The Avebury and Stonehenge landscapes are extensive, both being around 25 square kilometres, and capture the relationship between the monuments as well as their landscape setting.

At Avebury the boundary was extended in 2008 to include East Kennet Long Barrow and Fyfield Down with its extensive Bronze Age field system and naturally occurring Sarsens. At Stonehenge the boundary will be reviewed to consider the possible inclusion of related, significant monuments nearby such as Robin Hood's Ball, a Neolithic causewayed enclosure.

The setting of some key monuments extends beyond the boundary. Provision of buffer zones or planning guidance based on a comprehensive setting study should be considered to protect the setting of both individual monuments and the overall setting of the Property.

The survival of the Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments at both Stonehenge and Avebury is exceptional and remarkable given their age – they were built and used between around 3700 and 1600 BC. Stone and earth monuments retain their original design and materials. The timber structures have disappeared but postholes indicate their location. Monuments have been regularly maintained and repaired as necessary.

The presence of busy main roads going through the World Heritage Property impacts adversely on its integrity. The roads sever the relationship between Stonehenge and its surrounding monuments, notably the A344 which separates the Stone Circle from the Avenue. At Avebury, roads cut through some key monuments including the Henge and the West Kennet Avenue. The A4 separates the Sanctuary from its barrow group at Overton Hill. Roads and vehicles also cause damage to the fabric of some monuments while traffic noise and visual intrusion have a negative impact on their settings. The incremental impact of highway-related clutter needs to be carefully managed.

Development pressures are present and require careful management. Impacts from existing intrusive development should be mitigated where possible.

Authenticity

Interventions have been limited mainly to excavations and the re-erection of some fallen or buried stones to their known positions in the early and mid-twentieth century in order to improve understanding. Ploughing, burrowing animals and early excavation have resulted in some losses but what remains is remarkable in its completeness and concentration. The materials and substance of the archaeology supported by the archaeological archives continue to provide an authentic testimony to prehistoric technological and creative achievement.

This survival and the huge potential of buried archaeology make the Property an extremely important resource for archaeological research which continues to uncover new evidence and expand our understanding of prehistory. Present day research has enormously improved our understanding of the Property.

The known principal monuments largely remain in situ and many are still dominant features in the rural landscape. Their form and design are well-preserved and visitors are easily able to appreciate their location, setting and interrelationships which in combination represent landscapes

without parallel.

At Stonehenge several monuments have retained their alignment on the Solstice sunrise and sunset, including the Stone Circle, the Avenue, Woodhenge, and the Durrington Walls Southern Circle and its Avenue.

Although the original ceremonial use of the monuments is not known, they retain spiritual significance for some people, and many still gather at both stone circles to celebrate the Solstice and other observations. Stonehenge is known and valued by many more as the most famous prehistoric monument in the world.

There is a need to strengthen understanding of the overall relationship between remains, both buried and standing, at Stonehenge and at Avebury.

Protection and Management Requirements

The UK Government protects World Heritage Sites in England in two ways. Firstly individual buildings, monuments and landscapes are designated under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the 1979 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act and secondly through the UK Spatial Planning system under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Acts. The individual sites within the Site are protected through the Government's designation of individual buildings, monuments, gardens and landscapes.

Government guidance on protecting the Historic Environment and World Heritage is set out in National Planning Policy Framework and Circular 07/09. Policies to protect, promote, conserve and enhance World Heritage Sites, their settings and buffer zones are also found in statutory planning documents. The protection of the Property and its setting from inappropriate development could be further strengthened through the adoption of a specific Supplementary Planning Document.

At a local level, the Site is protected by the legal designation of all its principal monuments. There is a specific policy in the Local Development Framework to protect the Outstanding Universal Value of the Property from inappropriate development, along with adequate references in relevant strategies and plans at all levels. The Wiltshire Core Strategy 2026 includes a specific World Heritage Property policy (59). This policy states that additional planning guidance will be produced to ensure its effective implementation and thereby the protection of the World Heritage Property from inappropriate development. The policy also recognises the need to produce a setting study to enable this. The review of the Stonehenge boundary will need to be completed prior to work on the setting study. The boundary review should be completed in 2013 and work on the setting study is anticipated to begin in 2014.

The Local Planning Authority is responsible for continued protection through policy development and its effective implementation in deciding planning applications with the management plans for Stonehenge and Avebury as a key material consideration. These plans also take into account the range of other values relevant to the Site in addition to Outstanding Universal Value. Avebury lies within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty: a national statutory designation to ensure the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the landscape.

About a third of the Property at both Stonehenge and Avebury is owned and managed by conservation bodies: English Heritage, a non-departmental government body, and the National Trust and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds which are both charities. Agri-environment schemes, an example of partnership working between private landowners and Natural England (a

non-departmental government body), are very important for protecting and enhancing the setting of prehistoric monuments through measures such as grass restoration and scrub control. Much of the Property can be accessed through public rights of way as well as permissive paths and open access provided by some agri-environment schemes. Managed open access is provided at Solstice. There are a significant number of private households within the Property and local residents therefore have an important role in its stewardship

The Property has effective management plans, coordinators and steering groups at both Stonehenge and Avebury. There is a need for an overall integrated management system for the Site. A review of the current system and governance arrangements is currently underway. It seeks to produce an overarching management structure while retaining local elements to enable specific local issues to be addressed and the meaningful engagement of the community. It is anticipated that the recommendations of this review will be implemented in 2014. Research Frameworks have been published for the Site and are regularly reviewed. A single Stonehenge and Avebury Framework is currently under preparation.

An overall visitor management and interpretation strategy, together with a landscape strategy needs to be put in place to optimise access to and understanding of the Property. This should include improved interpretation for visitors and the local community both on site and in local museums holding collections excavated from the Property as well as through publications and the web. These objectives are being addressed at Stonehenge through the development of a visitor centre and the Interpretation, Learning and Participation Strategy (2010 -15). A similar strategy is yet to be produced for Avebury. This issue will be addressed in the updated Management Plan. Visitor management and sustainable tourism challenges and opportunities are addressed by specific objectives in both the Stonehenge and Avebury Management Plans.

Understanding of the overall relationship between buried and standing remains continues to be developed through research projects such as the "Between the Monuments" project and extensive geophysical surveys. The developing World Heritage Property Research Framework which will be completed in 2013 will encourage further relevant research. The Woodland Strategy, an example of a landscape level management project, will be complete in early 2013. This can be built on to include other elements of landscape scale planning.

It is important to maintain and enhance the improvements to monuments achieved through grass restoration and to avoid erosion of earthen monuments and buried archaeology through visitor pressure and burrowing animals.

At the time of inscription the State Party agreed to remove the A344 road to reunite Stonehenge and its Avenue and improve the setting of the Stone Circle. Work to deliver the closure of the A344 is now underway and will be complete in 2013. A new Stonehenge visitor centre is currently under construction and will be delivered by the end of 2013. This will provide world class visitor facilities including interpretation of the wider World Heritage Site landscape and the removal of modern clutter from the setting of the Stone Circle. Although substantial progress is being made, the impact of roads and traffic remains a major challenge in both parts of the World Heritage Property. The A303 continues to have a negative impact on the setting of Stonehenge, the integrity of the Site and visitor access to some parts of the wider landscape. A long term solution remains to be found. At Avebury, a World Heritage Site Traffic Strategy is planned for development during 2013/14. The strategy will establish guidance and identify an holistic set of actions to address the negative impacts that the dominance of roads, traffic and related clutter has on integrity, the condition and setting of monuments and the ease and confidence with which visitors and the local community are able to explore the wider Property.