



Stonehenge and Avebury WHS Partnership Panel Meeting Minutes

Microsoft Teams

10.00am – 11.00am, Wednesday 19th January 2022

Attendees:

Sarah Askham (notes)
Anne Carney
Emma Sayer (chair)
Hugh Morrison
Henry Oliver

Jan Tomlin
Colin Shell
Ross Simmonds
Cllr. Nabil Najjar

1. Apologies and Introductions

Apologies from Nichola Tasker.

2. Introduction from Emma Sayer

ES – At present the focus should be on the Governance Review rather than the Management Plan Review. With a UNESCO mission looming and time running out in terms of project funding, we need to make this the focus of activity for the Partnership Panel and therefore the Steering Groups for the next quarter.

All agreed.

3. Minutes of Last Meeting/ Matters Arising

ES – how widely is it known by the Steering Committees that we may have a UNESCO mission in the next few months?

HO – it is likely that there are a number who may know as National Trust, CPRE and ASAHRG representatives' site on the Steering Groups, but I think the majority will be unaware.

HM – I believe the majority are unaware, only a smattering will know.

ES – in the spirit of transparency are we content as a panel to ack the chairs of the Steering Committee's to tell their members that DCMS have extended an invite to UNESCO for a mission?

RS – there is a huge degree of uncertainty on if it will happen in February or March, however the initial approached have been made.

ES – I believe we should share this information and, unless people have any objections, I am going to ask the chairs to take this forward as an action.

ACTION: HO/ HM to share information with the Steering Committees regarding the UNESCO mission.

Spelling corrections to the previous minutes made.

Minutes agreed.

4. A303 Amesbury to Berwick Down Improvement Scheme

AC – I have a brief verbal update about the A303 scheme. The DCO for the proposed scheme was quashed by the high court last July and the Secretary of State has re-determined the application. A Statement of Matters was issued in November, and this outlined new areas that information was being sought for. It also explores options for a new scheme, such as a longer tunnel and looks further into environmental impacts. Highways England have responded to the Statement of Matters and all information should be available on the Planning Inspectorate website. Partners will be invited to comment, but we are unsure on the timing and we do not know how long this process will last and where it will fit with the World Heritage Committee in June. National Highways have also produced a virtual reality experience and several partners have been invited to see this; it will show the road as is and then give a version which shows the scheme as proposed.

5. State of Conservation Report

AC – the Coordination Unit are working with Henry Reed from DCMS and Helen Woodhouse from Historic England to produce the State of Conservation Report. The report has now gone to ministers at DCMS and will be forwarded to the World Heritage Committee for the deadline of the 1st February 2022. In tandem with this, there has been a request to UNESCO for a mission to visit the WHS – this is likely to take place in either February or March. It is also worthwhile to note that the 45th session of the World Heritage Committee will be held in Russia in February – there will be 12 new committee members which may or may not be familiar with the A303 road scheme.

6. Trust Transition Project

AC - The Trust Transition Project Board was held this morning at 9am to review the options proposed by the governance consultant, and the board has been asked to get comments back to the Chair and the Coordination Unit by 31st January 2022. After this morning's meeting we will need to hold another virtual project board meeting with another Partnership Panel meeting at the end to agree on a recommendation to take forward to the Steering Committees.

ES – Henry and Hugh, do you think you will be able to hold conversations with Steering Committee members virtually and what timetable would allow for that?

HO – is this after we have seen the recommendation from the project board? Can we hold a virtual consultation rather than an actual meeting?

ES – it could be useful to have in person consultations – would it be helpful to think about doing this in-person?

HO – are you suggesting that we go and talk to individuals, say in groups of 2 or 3, rather than the Steering Committee as a whole?

ES – we could have a big in-person meeting for the individual Steering Groups.

HO – if we can make this work, then we will try. In terms of getting meeting dates – how feasible is it in terms of the time frame?

HM – I mirror Henry's comments.

CS – it is important that the Steering Committees hear other members views and be able to have a discussion. An in-person meeting could also be a joint meeting, and this would be preferred in terms of due process.

ES – this is something we will aim to do, but I am nervous about the timescale. I will take this away and look at dates.

7. WHSCU Work Update

AC – I have submitted a written report for the units work prior to this meeting, however I wish to touch on two things: the setting study and the condition survey. Regarding the setting study I have an update from Andrew Croft, the consultant, that it is progressing in line with the timetable. The full draft is due in late February, which Wiltshire Council will view and comment on in March/ April. This will come to the Partnership Panel for comment in May/ June and go out for public consultation in July/ August. A copy will also be sent to the World Heritage Committee as requested by November 2022. The consultant has one more site visit to carry out in late January and they are also waiting for the revised IUCN guidance on HIA's by ICOMOS. The condition survey is about to be re-tendered, and the brief has had no fundamental changes. Hopefully someone will come forward to undertake the work as it was put out for tender last year, but no one came forward.

HO – do we have a sense of why no one went for it last time and why it should be different this time?

AC – I believe the difficulties were around consultants' capacities in line with the a303 scheme. We now have a temporary lull with the scheme so someone may come forward if they have capacity.

HO – there was talk of the budget not being sufficient, could this have contributed?

RS – I believe it was a combination of both. This is something I will be discussing with colleagues.

8. Partner Updates

Wiltshire Council

NN – we articulated Wiltshire Council’s position on the Trust Transition at the Trust Transition Project Board meeting. We are also working on the ‘What’s on in Wiltshire’ programme. This will be an integrated app platform to help stakeholders share everything going on in the county. We are making good progress and are set to launch in time for the Queen’s Jubilee – we will share more information as time goes on. This is a unique opportunity to articulate your fantastic offerings to the public. I wanted to put this on everyone’s agendas and if you have any questions please do email myself or Melanie.

CS – I wish to discuss Sam Rose’s suggestion as to what can be done to improve the position of the Coordination Unit without changing the Governance Review. He proposed to move the unit and said it was likely to be happening. Can we be updated on that as it is very important and should proceed as soon as possible – aspects of independent management and budget can be organised separate from a governance change.

ES – can Nabil answer this? Richard has underlined Wiltshire Council’s commitment to stronger independence for the Coordination Unit and mentioned that they were awaiting key appointments in the council’s new structure.

NN – we are still looking to appoint the Director of Environment. It is hard to give reassurances at this stage. We are committed to trying to make things work, but there does need to be a balance between responsibility and input. As the primary financial sponsor, we should then have a degree of direct decision making. Thank you for everyone’s patience.

ES – the aim is for the Coordination Unit to act in the same way as the AONB’s and Richard expressed support. This is the only thing that all partners were universal on and how important that this factor is. Like all coordination units across the UK, ours needs an independent voice. There are challenges in being a hosted organisation, but it works successfully for the AONB’s so I am positive that this is a model that can be successfully adopted.

NN – we also work with other models. These are all partnership organisations and the strengths come from the wider expertise from the wider audience. This is a decision we need to take through the proper channels within Wiltshire Council and then come back to you with a proper, more concrete, answer.

Historic England

RS – Rebecca Barret is now back in position following her maternity leave. We have not fully sorted out arrangements on who is doing what and this is a key priority. We will be finding out how to manage projects in the coming weeks. Anne mentioned the virtual reality system visits and I wanted to say that Historic England are expecting to visit on the 25th. We also have new project manager dealing with the a303 scheme – Andrew Burn, who is taking over from Helen Woodhouse who has moved into our international team.

National Trust

JT – we are having challenges with visitor behaviour and hare coursing which has taken up much of the attention of our team. The challenging behaviour is spilling over from byways in the north and south and there is a permanent presence at the Ridgeway at Avebury – the padlock is regularly cut off the gates and we pick up the fallout on the landscape. Byway 12 is very busy

and there is a good chance that the hare coursing has also started here. We are very busy trying to keep the landscape safe and appropriately conserved, it doesn't appear much when said but it is an awful lot of work on the ground. Nick Droy is our new Assistant Director who will be taking on responsibility for our Wiltshire portfolio.

Avebury Steering Committee/ NWDAONB

HO – I have an update regarding the monument management scheme that is being run through the Ridgeway partnership: there has been a change of officer at Historic England which meant that the project has changed shape as the position that Historic England had taken previously has now changed, and we have now had to redefine the projects with partners at the Ridgeway Partnership. Nevertheless, we are hoping to be up and running next financial year and we are also trying to develop and coordinate a group of volunteers to look at the monuments' conditions along the Ridgeway National Trial. It is the NWDAONB 50th anniversary next year and we are looking towards badging various projects, such as the walking festival in June. The Farming and Protected Landscapes programme is well up and running and this is an opportunity for landowners/ managers for capital investment in different forms with a view to improve nature, climate, heritage, public access and understanding. It is a 3-year programme with an opportunity for significant amounts of money. At a strategic level, it has been 2 and half years since the Glover document was published and the government has announced its response to this last weekend. The consultation on this will be running until the 9th of April if anyone is interested in inputting into it. We need to make sure that the historic environment is not excluded from the landscape when looking at challenges of nature/ environmental conservation.

ASAHRG

CS – The scheme for improving the Ridgeway is ironic given that we still have damage taking place. Sarah Wright, the Project Officer for the Ridgeway National Trial, has said that there is a government level responsibility that motorised vehicles should be banned from trials as a national initiative, rather than dealing with the matter locally. Coming back to the Coordination Unit report and the B4003 update, ASAHRG have previously recommended that a one-way system be put in place as a temporary measure to prevent damage to the verges. Repair to the verges need not be considered in a one-way system was in place. We have an ASAHRG meeting on Friday and I wish to take the consultants report to that meeting and get some reaction that I can report back with.

Stonehenge Steering Committee

HM – I want to reiterate what Janet said about anti-social behaviour and the public use of the byways. The occupation of byway 12 is a continuous problem for all those living and working in the landscape at Stonehenge. We are also having problems with public dogs and sheep. On a happier note, the farmer cluster is up and running with the help of Esther Gordon Smith at Highways England. I have nothing else to report from other members of the Steering Committee.

9. AOB

ES – I wish to discuss the structure and preparation time for the next set of meetings. Doodle poll has been used in the past, however this has presented difficulties and I would like to

propose fixed meeting dates every quarter. They will be held on a Tuesday 10am-12pm every 3rd month from now.

All agreed.

ES – how far in advance do you require papers to be sent out so that decisions can be made on the day?

JT – 2 weeks at the least.

RS – 2 weeks as a minimum, I would prefer longer.

NN – 2 weeks minimum, the more time the better the response.

ES – we will aim for a minimum of 2 weeks with a preference to getting papers out 3 weeks prior to the meeting. papers may not all come out together.

ES – could I also ask you to go back and get a view from your organisations regarding Sam's paywall idea. This idea should not solely apply to English Heritage and I would like to know if your organisation could incur a surcharge on its products that could be passed onto the WHS. Please could you go back to your respective organisations and ask the questions so that I may have a view.

10. Dates of Next Meetings

SA to send placeholders for next 6 Partnership Panels as agreed.