Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites Inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1986

2025-26 Activity Report

This year has seen many highlights in World Heritage Site [WHS] protection, conservation and engagement responding to the Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites World Heritage Site Management Plan.

From a collection of Harold St George Gray photographs of Windmill Hill
© Alexander Keiller Museum

In April 2025, the **National Trust celebrated 100 years since the start of Alexander Keiller's excavations at Windmill Hill**. Between April 1925 and 1929, thousands of objects were discovered at the ancient monument which today lies within the WHS, including Neolithic pottery sherds, flint tools, animal bones, traces of wheat, and human remains. These discoveries initiated Windmill Hill's significant contribution to our understanding of British prehistory, as **some of the first evidence for the life of early farming communities in Britain.** Agriculture continues to define and shape the landscape today. An exhibition in the Alexander Keiller Museum during the centenary year displayed a selection of the objects uncovered, and information on the legacy of the Windmill Hill excavations.

In spring 2025, **English Heritage began constructing a new learning centre at Stonehenge,** made possible thanks to the generous support of donors. Facilities include a re-created Neolithic Hall for living history, a STEM-focused Discovery Lab and digital studio. Volunteers are helping to construct the new Kusuma Neolithic Hall using experimental archaeology and historically authentic materials. The design of the structure is inspired by the nearby prehistoric settlement Durrington Walls within the WHS.

Local schoolchildren break ground on Stonehenge's new learning spaces using Neolithic tools
© English Heritage

English Heritage's Operations Director Stonehenge and West, Steve Bax, said: *"Around 48,000 children visit Stonehenge on free school trips every year, and a further 12,000 on our expert-led Discovery Visits. At Stonehenge, students can trace the impact of human activity on the environment, learn how prehistoric engineers raised the stones, explore the relationship between the sun and Stonehenge and discover how geophysical surveys can uncover buried secrets.* ***Our new facilities aim to make these STEM topics far more accessible to students who struggle to engage with them in a traditional classroom environment.*** *We want them to come away asking themselves: if the Stonehenge builders could create something incredible thousands of years ago, without calculators and computers, why can't I?"*

In May 2025 Visit England granted VisitWiltshire Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) status. **VisitWiltshire continues to ensure the WHS is featured in international visitor itineraries**, for example recently partnering with VisitBritain to promote Stonehenge and Avebury as part of a new high-profile 5-7 day itinerary for international visitors along the Great West Way.

© LoGa Culture

Over the summer, visitors to Avebury were invited to try a number of locative games using their smartphones. The **locative gaming technology research project** saw the National Trust partnering with Bournemouth and Southampton Universities to engage visitors on-site and virtually in narratives focussed on both Avebury henge and the wider Avebury landscape. The project blends Avebury's physical Neolithic landscape with digital, augmented reality (AR), and mixed-reality gameplay. These immersive experiences are part of the international LoGaCulture research project and allows players to explore hidden archaeology, walk in the footsteps of ancient people, and solve puzzles.

In October 2025, **Wiltshire Council adopted a pivotal planning document for the WHS** following a spring public consultation. It sets out how the landscape around Stonehenge and Avebury will continue to be protected for future generations to experience and understand. This new Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) now informs decisions for proposed developments that may affect the setting of the Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments and the unparalleled archaeological landscape.

Also in October 2025, the **Wiltshire & Swindon Local Nature Recovery Strategy** was adopted, with measures to maintain, enhance and create more calcareous grassland in the WHS. **Agri-environment schemes, supported by Natural England**, continue to be delivered by local land managers with mutual benefits for nature and archaeology. In the last year, the **National Trust completed the initial phase of reseeding** to revert all National Trust owned land in the Stonehenge landscape that was under arable cultivation to **species rich chalk grassland**, with further enhancement of species diversity. And in November 2025, the **North Wessex Downs National Landscape Management Plan (2025-30)** was launched, reaffirming the commitment of partners to protect and enhance one of southern England's most treasured natural environments, including the Avebury landscape.

In 2025 **two new independent Chair positions were appointed in the WHS Partnership**, Sarah Nichols as Chair of the Executive Board and Andy Miller as Chair of the Expert & Stakeholder Group, following the ratification of a new partnership governance structure. Work has started this year on the **review and update of the WHS Management Plan**, for completion late 2027.

In Spring 2026 **Amesbury Town Council bid to be the first UK Town of Culture in 2028**. The home of Stonehenge, Amesbury has a vibrant community and rich history dating back thousands of years. The submission marks the first stage of a national competition led by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The bid sets out an ambitious and community-driven vision for a year-long cultural programme designed to inspire pride, participation and opportunity.

A **new UNESCO UK trail to inspire sustainable exploration** across the South West launched in spring 2026 in partnership with Great Western Railway. New website Explore UNESCO South West Trails helps visitors and residents to discover the region's rich cultural and natural heritage by rail and bus. In Wiltshire, a two-day Wiltshire World Heritage itinerary starts at Salisbury train station, traveling to Stonehenge and onto Devizes by bus. The next day, take the bus to Avebury before finishing at Swindon train station. The trail includes museums, market towns and the iconic monuments and landscape of Stonehenge and Avebury WHS.

Following severe flooding in January 2024, Avebury Manor has undergone extensive restoration and has now re-opened to the public. This work included **relocating thousands of artifacts from the Alexander Keiller Museum** to a new archive in the Manor's library. In addition to the physical archive, the four-year Avebury Papers Arts and Humamities Research Council funded project has been working to digitise, explore and share the multimedia archive of Avebury's Neolithic origins and its subsequent life-history. This year saw the **completion of archive digitisation and further research on the material held in the Alexander Keiller Museum Archive**. The project is a collaboration between Southampton, Bristol and York Universities, the Archaeological Data Service and the National Trust, with support from Historic England and English Heritage Trust.

This year saw the **launch of three new websites related to the WHS**. The new Avebury and Stonehenge Archaeological and Historical Research Group (ASAHRG) website is an online hub for WHS research with key documents, mapping, and upcoming selected publications. Furthermore, a new website for the Avebury Society provides useful information about local talks and projects, , such as the Drawn and Quartered exhibition featuring a selection of people who have been inspired by or stayed in Avebury over the years, and a recently commissioned comprehensive bibliography of books relating to Avebury.
A refreshed website for Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site offers enhanced information about the WHS and how it is cared for, as well as links to partner learning opportunities and how to explore the landscape, its monuments and collections.

Following the first pandemic lockdown, research project Places of Joy examined how people were using visits to heritage sites such as Avebury during this time and the role heritage sites played in their wellbeing. The initial project, supported by Historic England and the Heritage Alliance with the Universities of Southampton, Cambridge and Surrey and the National Trust, found that single visits to heritage sites have clear subjective wellbeing effects in increasing happiness and reducing anxiety. This year, **'Places of Joy 5 Years On' has sought to collect further data to understand how people's responses may be similar or different to those during the pandemic** to understand if anything has changed or whether the motivations and experiences of the pandemic have had a lasting effect on visitors

Looking ahead, WHS partners are preparing to mark the 40th anniversary of inscription as one of the first seven UK WHSs – both locally, including a community celebration held by The Avebury Society, and nationally with the other six WHSs.