

Avebury World Heritage Site Management Plan

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Avebury World Heritage Site Management Plan

1. The Avebury World Heritage Site

The Avebury complex of sites and monuments, situated on the edge of the Marlborough Downs in north eastern Wiltshire, represents a unique surviving example of outstanding human endeavour in Neolithic times and later. Avebury Henge, Stone Circles and associated sites, seen in juxtaposition to later historic features - small villages, designed parklands and large manor houses, greatly contribute to a distinctive historic and cultural landscape. The particularly rich assemblage of archaeological sites, both visible and buried, provides a vivid record of past landscape patterns and use. Indeed, these monuments and features have exerted a considerable visual and cultural influence on the surrounding landscape for almost 5, 000 years. Since 1986, the outstanding universal value of the Avebury complex has been recognised by its inscription, together with Stonehenge, as a World Heritage Site (WHS) under the UNESCO World Heritage Convention.

The boundary of the Avebury WHS encloses an area of 22.5 square kilometres around the six key prehistoric monuments in the care of the state (in “Guardianship”) which form the basis of the WHS designation. These monuments are: Avebury Henge and Stone Circles; Windmill Hill; Silbury Hill; West Kennet Long Barrow; West Kennet Avenue; the Sanctuary. These monuments are managed by the National Trust who own and manage just under a third of the WHS for the purposes of permanent preservation and public access. The rest of the WHS is in multiple ownership and is an intensely farmed landscape with a thriving local village at the core of the area. In addition to its historical and archaeological significance, the Avebury WHS also contains many important features of built heritage and nature conservation value. The overall importance of the conservation value of the WHS is reflected in its inclusion within the North Wessex Downs Area Of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The majority of the Avebury WHS is, therefore, subject to a variety of pressures from modern life. The present land use pressures on the historic and natural resources arise principally from agriculture, tourism and traffic.

2. The purpose of the Management Plan

The WHS Management Plan has been prepared on behalf of the Avebury WHS Working Party in consultation with local people and all those with an interest in the management of the area. The Working Party comprises representatives from the agencies who hold management responsibilities in the WHS. English Heritage, as the lead body developing Management Plans for World Heritage Sites in England, funded a collaborative project which developed the Management Plan for Avebury between September 1996 and August 1998.

World Heritage designation brings enormous prestige to Avebury but does not carry with it any additional statutory controls. However, as stated in the Government’s Planning Policy Guidance Note 15:“ Planning and the Historic Environment”, WHS status is a key material factor which must be taken into account by the local authorities when making planning decisions. The Plan is not prescriptive or binding on landowners and management agencies, but aims to set the framework for co-ordinated management and the development of partnerships. In this way, the WHS Plan is intended to enhance the existing plan coverage (such as the local statutory plans and the National Trust’s estate management plan) and will serve to inform existing and future management documents relating to the area.

The preparation this strategic Management Plan for the entire WHS is a significant move forward in securing the future character and quality of the WHS landscape as a whole, which is locally cherished and internationally recognised. The Plan provides a framework for the holistic and proactive management of the landscape, helping to ensure that the special qualities of the WHS are sustained and preserved for future generations.

In particular the Plan aims to:

- establish an overall vision for the long-term future of the Avebury WHS which will be widely accepted.
- explore opportunities for positive management with farmers, landowners, and other agencies which will enhance the landscape character of the WHS whilst respecting economic interests.
- provide guidance and attract widespread support and which will lead to an increased understanding, respect and care for this exceptional cultural landscape.

3. The Contents of the Plan

The process of developing this Plan has involved a great deal of research, survey and consultation. As part of this process, English Heritage employed consultants to undertake a landscape assessment and a visitor and traffic management assessment of the WHS. In addition, English Heritage has developed a comprehensive database of all the cultural and environmental assets of the WHS, held within a Geographical Information System (GIS). These projects form the main building blocks of the Management Plan.

The Plan comprises a statement of the objectives necessary for the long term preservation of the WHS and its landscape setting, aiming to balance the interests of conservation, public access, and the interests of those who live and work in the area. The objectives are based on the identification of the values of the WHS, key management issues, and an assessment of why the WHS is sensitive and vulnerable to the pressures of modern life.

Part One of the Plan contains an assessment of the cultural values that make Avebury special, including justification for its inscription as a WHS. The protection of WHS values and sympathetic land management within the area greatly depends on identifying and resolving key management issues. Part Two contains the descriptive information used in the identification of 51 issues related to management needs. Following on from the description and evaluation, Part Three sets out objectives for the management of the WHS based on a strategic view over thirty years, and medium term objectives for five to ten years. In total, twenty-five objectives have been identified. The overall long-term objectives set the context for the more detailed medium-term objectives, strategies and programme for action outlined in Part Four.

The Plan has been specifically designed and formatted to foster its use as a working document, which can be updated on a regular basis. For this purpose, a range of supplementary information has been placed into appendices and presented at the back of the main Plan.

4. Avebury’s World Heritage and other values

The identification of the cultural values of the Avebury WHS forms the basis of, and underpins, the Management Plan. This approach should help to ensure that the values that make Avebury important, especially its “outstanding universal value”, are not diminished. The international importance of Avebury, together with Stonehenge, was recognised by its inscription onto the World Heritage List, as site C373 (Stonehenge, Avebury and associated sites), in 1986 on the nomination of the UK Government. The nominating document describes Stonehenge and Avebury as the two most important prehistoric monuments in Britain.

For a site to be included on the World Heritage List it must meet at least one of six criteria set out in the World Heritage Convention. The inscription of Avebury and Stonehenge onto the List recognises that together they fulfill the following three criteria:

- Represent a masterpiece of human creative genius
- Exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in monumental arts or town planning and landscape design
- Bears a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilisation which is living or which has disappeared

In the first part of the Management Plan the values of the Avebury WHS have been defined and described under the following headings:

- archaeological and historical**
- landscape and conservation**
- social**
- economic**
- research and educational**

It is recognised that these values do overlap quite considerably, but together they cover the full range of the site’s cultural significance.

5. Long-term objectives

- Understand and influence the long-term change in the WHS cultural landscape for the benefit of the historic environment.
- Gain recognition for Avebury as a very special place for which special treatment should be given by government departments, agencies, landowners and visitors in order to safeguard the historic environmental assets of the WHS and their setting for the benefit of succeeding generations.
- Meet Britain’s obligations under the World Heritage Convention in relation to the effective management of the Avebury WHS.
- Ensure the sustainability of all uses of the WHS.

6. Short and medium-term objectives

The monuments and their historic landscape setting:

- Provide the most appropriate landscape setting for all the major monuments and to halt ongoing degradation of sites and monuments under current land use.
- Enhance and conserve the landscape character of the WHS with respect to tree cover and other planted features.
- Enhance and protect the visual sensitivity of the key monuments and their setting.
- Ensure the boundary of the WHS offers the best possible protection for the monuments and their landscape setting.
- Develop management compartments for the WHS an prepare appropriate action plans for each.
- Establish an accurate picture of the current condition and vulnerability of all monuments.

The planning and policy framework:

- Maintain and enhance the rich built heritage features in the WHS, recognising their relationship to the monuments and landscape.
- Optimise the use of agri-environmental schemes and other management agreements in order to enhance the protection of the monuments and their landscape setting.
- Enhance the protection of the monuments and historic landscape setting of the WHS afforded by the Local Plan and policy framework.
- Enhance the protection of the WHS from the activities which do not currently require planning permission, but are potentially damaging to upstanding and buried archaeological features.

Traffic and parking management:

- Develop long-term radical solutions for the reduction of volume and speed of traffic passing through the WHS.
- Implement short to medium-term measures providing comprehensive treatment to all important road links within the WHS, in order to improve safety and the quality of the historic environment.
- Implement a strategic policy to reduce parking congestion in the Village area on peak days, dispersing the pressure without exceeding the overall capacity of the WHS historic landscape to absorb change.
- Reduce the reliance on the private car by visitors to Avebury WHS, by encouraging the uses of more sustainable methods of transport to get to the site and to move around within it.

Public access and sustainability:

- Ensure all aspects of public access and tourism at Avebury are sustainable, despite the likelihood of increasing visitor numbers in future.
- Mitigate the physical damage caused to monuments and footpaths by the impact of visitor pressure, and restore the areas significantly effected.
- Reduce the negative effects of visitor pressure at Avebury on quality of life of local community.
- Encourage visitor appreciation of the wider landscape in order to enhance enjoyment and understanding of the WHS at the same time as dispersing visitor pressure from the Village area.
- Ensure that the development of any further visitor facilities at Avebury are compatible with sustainability objectives.
- Establish an integrated monitoring program which will promote proactive management by predicting potential damage to the site and will assess the effectiveness of management actions in tackling the problems.

Research

- Encourage and promote academic research to achieve a deeper understanding of the WHS necessary for its appropriate management. All research should be carried out with due regard to the principles of sustainability and to appropriate standards of work.

7. Implementing the Plan

The Plan seeks to advise and influence the management of the WHS in line with its objectives, but has no statutory power or status. It hopes to achieve a sense of “ownership” from all the users of the site, as well as the managers and the local community, in order to generate the commitment necessary to achieve its objectives.

Part Four of the Plan sets out a detailed **PROGRAMME FOR ACTION** to achieve the management objectives in the short-medium term. This section will be updated on a regular basis. The implementation of the Plan will be achieved by a variety of agencies and individuals who own or currently have management responsibilities in the WHS. Some strategies will require collective action, while others will fall to a single agency or individual. The willingness of owners and farmers to support the Plan and contribute to the maintenance of the historic landscape features is fundamental to the achievement of the objectives.

Two specific mechanisms are proposed to aid the successful achievement of the objectives:

- The continued existence of the Avebury WHS Working Party to oversee the implementation and delivery of the Plan and monitor its success.
- The provision of an Avebury WHS Officer, funded by English Heritage and accommodated by Kennet District Council. The Officer will develop methods for promoting proactive management and for reviewing and monitoring the effectiveness of the Management Plan in the long-term.

8. Contact information

Questions or further information about the Avebury WHS Management Plan should be addressed to:


The Avebury WHS Officer
Kennet District Council
Browfort
Bath Road
Devizes
Wiltshire
SN10 2AT
Tel: 01380 724911 extension 830
E-mail: melanie.pomeroy@kennet.gov.uk

9. Membership of the Avebury WHS Working Party

- Avebury Parish Council
- Countryside Commission
- Country Landowners Association
- Department for Culture, Media & Sport
- English Heritage
- English Nature
- Farming and Rural Conservation Agency (MAFF)
- ICOMOS UK
- Kennet District Council
- National Farmers Union
- National Trust
- Wiltshire County Council

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