

**Avebury World Heritage Site
Archaeological and Historical Research Group
DRAFT Notes of meeting 15 April 2008**

Present: Gill Swanton (Chair), Nick Snashall, Sarah Simmonds, Melanie Pomeroy Kellinger, Heather Sebire, Jude Currivan, Peter Fowler, Sian Williams, Colin Shell, Vanessa Clarke

1. Apologies and Introductions

Amanda Chadburn, Lisa Webb (Acting Curator Wiltshire Heritage Museum), Kate Fielden, Damian Grady, Jim Gunter, Martyn Barber, Bruce Eagles, Julie Scott-Jackson, David Andrew, Jonathan Last

Vanessa Clarke was welcomed as a new member of AAHRG. She has recently taken up the role of assistant county archaeologist.

2. Notes of last meeting and matters arising

2.1 Note

Draft notes from last minutes agreed.

2.2 Matters Arising

Traffic Incidents

SS reported that a request for details of traffic accidents and near misses had been sent out to the WHS steering committee and working groups. These were to serve as a basis for discussion of the urgent need to address road safety at the TVM group. Details of a number of incidents were received from 8 people underlining the risks raised at the last meeting of AAHRG. Despite evidence of the potential for serious accidents and fatalities, the fact that none have occurred makes costly interventions a lower priority for the Highways Authority and the police. Various actions related to traffic calming included in the management plan are also seen as representing problems of visual intrusion. It is however necessary to address the issue due to the unique context of Avebury where large visitor numbers heighten the risk. The TVM group has asked WCC to investigate and report on the feasibility of a commissioning a costed strategy addressing all the issues such as speed limits, calming and road closures and incorporating designs sensitive to the WHS context.

MPK mentioned that the Ringway Parkman traffic survey conducted in 1997 could serve as a useful basis.

Action: Chair of TVM to formally update Steering Committee on the work of the group.

SS to explore the possibility of making the meeting notes of the TVM, Steering Committee and AAHRG available on the web as pdfs.

Tree Planting at Overton

CS expressed concern that an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was not required for the planting of trees in this area discussed at the last meeting even though there had been objections to the project at the time. PF suggested that if the archaeological conditions applicable to woodland grant schemes had not been adhered to, the matter should be followed up with the Forestry Commission. He suggested that a meeting be arranged. MPK added that WCC and EH are now consulted on all woodland grant schemes affecting both scheduled and unscheduled areas. CS underlined the fact that since the 1999 Forestry Directive all planting within an AONB must adhere to the rules even if they are not government funded.

PF was concerned that hedgerows on Overton Hill will have an impact on the landscape and views. CS added that other areas of planting affect important views such as the one from the Swindon Road up to Windmill Hill. This is a sustainable tourism issue as it has an impact on the visitors' experience of the site. SS suggested adding important views to be retained to an easily accessible map such as the one under development for prioritising areas for arable reversion. GS asked that the AONB would be a valuable partner in this field. Their new assistant director and planner should be briefed on this issue. Steve Trow at EH may have suggestions on approaches to protection of the landscape and planting.

MPK added that there is currently no dedicated Historic Environment Countryside Advisor or HECAS officer in WCC. SW suggested that replacing this position would help greatly with coordination. MPK said she would approach EH regarding a possible reappointment. Work on Wiltshire's historic landscape characterisation study is due to start this year. This will put them in a stronger position to offer landscape advice.

Action: SS to approach IB regarding a meeting with CS and PF to discuss WHS planting issues.

MPK to explore support for a HECAS officer with EH.

Arable Reversion

SW expressed concerns about the future of land within the WHS that is currently held in Countryside Stewardship Schemes that are coming to an end. Some action will be necessary to persuade farmers to transfer to environmental stewardship schemes. CS suggested that an EIA (including historic environment impact) would be necessary if the areas were to be ploughed again and suggested consulting Steve Trow about exact requirements.

Action: SS to follow up on possibilities for encouraging retention of land within environmental schemes.

3. Research Agenda Update

SS reported that the project outline had been submitted to EH Historic Environment Enabling Programme (HEEP) for funding in February. She has been told that the outline has undergone internal analysis and will be returned in May with comments. Costs are currently estimated as £46,500 for the project. Generally comments have been encouraging but elements of the scale of the project and costing will need to be reviewed in drawing up a brief.

Action: SS to discuss the brief with AAHRG once formal comments received from EH

4. Prioritising Arable Reversion Project

Mapping

CS reported that the group working on mapping priority areas for reversion are gathering data sets. These should be assembled by mid-May and include archaeological and some Natural England data. Information from fieldwalking will be included with flint scatter data. JC offered to provide fieldwalking data from Knowle Down.

Fieldwalking

NS commented that fieldwalking was under resourced. MPK added that it is fairly difficult to gain funding as it is hard to justify in management terms. Although EH funded some studies in the past this funding is now uncertain. It is seen as of questionable value as reversion does not represent a loss of the resource. NS suggested that this view might be due to only crude typological analysis being undertaken. If work was done on chronometric characterisation of the assemblage, its value might be clearer. She suggested the need for this type of research is included in the update of Research Agenda. SW said that fieldwalking at the palisade enclosures that are due to be reverted in the autumn or spring of 2009 would be desirable from a research point of view. MPK and NS would be interested in reviewing any methodology applied at the site. CS will consider adaptations to the methodology used in previous studies. NS also offered to put together a report on the benefits of fieldwalking to help secure funding. CS suggested that results of fieldwalking might serve as a management tool as they could form part of an EIA proceeding a request for the return of an area to cultivation.

Stewardship

SW underlined her concern about the need to look for more realistic and attractive payments to keep those farmers with land in soon to expire CSS schemes committed to arable reversion. She added that the current delay in scheduling made this even more urgent. GS said that farmers would need to be able to justify this in the light of very high rises in the price of crops. She added that those with livestock on reverted land were also liable for rises in the cost of feed that might prove a disincentive. CS suggested that priorities identified also included land already reverted to ensure it is targeted and appropriate levels of incentive are provided to farmers. NS added that unscheduled areas must also be included and simplistic tick-box targeting avoided.

SS reported that she had a meeting scheduled in May with NE and the representative of WHS farmers to discuss stewardship issues. Stephanie Payne from NE is a member of the prioritisation-mapping group and is already supportive of a more detailed approach within the WHS taking into account far more than sites listed in the SMR.

Action: JC to send copy of Knowle Down date to CS, MPK, NS, SS and Wiltshire Heritage Museum at Devizes.

NS to sent information on fieldwalking to CS and MPK.

SS to send copies of the Wessex Archaeology fieldwalking reports to NS and MPK.

SW to clarify with NE when the palisade enclosure is due to be ploughed before reversion.

NS to prepare a report on the benefits of fieldwalking and suggest adaptations to the methodology used previously.

AC to lobby NE for appropriate support for stewardship within the WHS

SW to set up meeting with AC and SS to discuss stewardship and fieldwalking issues in the WHS

5. MEGAN Project

NS reported that Avebury had been represented at a meeting in March to discuss a megalithic network project linking sites in a partly European-funded

project for the Atlantic Region (Intereg 4B). The meeting was held at Carnac who has offered to lead on the bid. Callanish and Orkney were represented by Historic Scotland. Stonehenge and Alcalar in Portugal were also represented. The project aims to share best practice through yearly workshops and monographs with management and research-based themes and to provide educational material via a website and education pack. Useful exchanges of information and experience resulted from the initial meeting. Work is underway on the project design and the feasibility of securing funding and sufficient resources. It is not yet certain that the project will proceed. The NT has put forward an internal request for funding. HS commented that involvement in EU projects in the Channel Islands had proved very beneficial.

6. Fieldwork and Research Proposals - All

There were no reports or proposals presented.

7. Development control and utilities - All

MPK reported that there had been three applications: Bonds Garage and have already been addressed at AAHRG. She has requested a watching brief for a large extension at Dorwyn on the Swindon Road.

Work on the undergrounding at Overton Hill is progressing. MPK, NS and SS met John Daemon from Scottish and Southern Electricity to discuss the route. Necessary geophysics was requested. Oxford Archaeology will draw up an archaeological method statement for all works to be sent to MPK. CS has some relevant geophysics from the area that he can provide. MPK added that open cut work will be avoided in the scheduled areas

NS thanked SS for her work in setting up the undergrounding project and funding.

Action: NS to put John Daemon in contact with CS regarding the geophysical results

8. AOB

Ridgeway Surface Protection Project

PF gave a brief oral report on work at the Ridgeway in advance of a written report. He reported on partnership working designed to reach consensus on

a flexible approach to managing the surface of the National Trail within the WHS. CS and GS undertook precise GPS positioning work followed by an archaeological survey carried out by GS and himself. Only 400m remain to survey.

There have been 3 main findings. The ditch at the north end of Overton Down is not in fact isolated with several more positioned east-west. There are very extensive ridge and furrow running east-west across the Ridgeway indicating that it was probably not in existence in the period from mid-thirteenth to fourteenth century. At the south end there are settlement earthworks at the western fringe of the complex. The Ridgeway appears to constitute a linear archeoreserve while evidence on either side has been mostly lost to the plough.

The findings will be transcribed as a detailed, annotated archaeological map to pass on to contractors once a suitable strategy for each area has been agreed upon.

SS added that she will present the importance of this work and its findings at the upcoming Ridgeway Annual Forum.

Action: PF to provide details to MPK and colleagues

GS, PF and CS to send images to SS to illustrate her presentation at the Ridgeway Forum

Informal Accommodation

GS reported on the second facilitated workshop to assess alternatives for accommodating pagan observances. Four options appeared to be identified at the workshop although it was not a forum for final decision-making. An impromptu field visit to the area opposite West Kennet Avenue closed the day. A working group will need to be formed to assess the implications in wide terms and assess the management risks of each of the options. Other options may need to be returned to. Attendance was uneven with few archaeologists able to attend. SS emphasised the difficulties of any of the identified options on landscape and management grounds. Further consultation is scheduled to explore this issue.

9. Date of next meeting

Tuesday, June 24th at 10.30am in the Study Centre