

**Avebury World Heritage Site
Archaeological and Historical Research Group
DRAFT Notes of meeting 26th February 2010**

Present: Melanie Pomeroy Kellinger , Amanda Chadburn (Chair), Mike Allen, Bruce Eagles, Colin Shell, Gill Swanton, Brian Edwards, Paul Cripps, Sarah Simmonds, Nick Snashall, David Dawson, Jim Gunter, Josh Pollard, Ros Cleal, Katy Whitaker, Nicola Hembrey, Vicky Crosby, Martyn Barber, David Vaughan, Nick Baxter

1. Apologies and Introductions

Andrew Lawson, Heather Sebire, Matilda Webb, Jude Currivan, Andrew David, Simon Crutchley, Julie Scott-Jackson, Kate Fielden, Jonathan Last and Sian Williams

Nicola Hembrey and Vicky Crosby are new to AAHRG. They work for the EH Research Department Archaeological Projects Team and are proposing a project to evaluate the Romano-British Settlement south of Silbury reported under item 5.1 below.

2. Minutes and matters arising

2.1 Minutes

Draft notes from last minutes agreed.

2.2 Matters Arising

Start of the Ridgeway

NS reported that there was no damage at the start of the Ridgeway from the newly formed stone circle but that the NT would continue to monitor activities at the site for potential threat. CS expressed concern that the shrine fixture would be permanent; NS will send the warden to review the situation.

Alexander Keiller Museum

NS reported that there was no change at Avebury in relation to the Alexander Keiller Museum. The NT has a new general manager for Avebury and Stonehenge as well as other properties falling under the title of Wiltshire Countryside. Janet Tomlin, who has a military background, will start work on March 1st. She is sympathetic to conservation and archaeology.

Research Agenda Project Board

SS reported that the Project Board for the Research Agenda update had had their first meeting on 22nd December.

Arable Prioritisation

A further meeting was held with Natural England regarding the Arable Reversion Prioritisation Project. NE is now working on producing a final version of the map accessible to their own and non-specialists. They would

like to see the map incorporated into the updated management plan and employed to help to achieve landscape level gains through the planned targeting of vulnerable areas.

West Kennet Avenue

AC reported that the Highways had been granted an SMC to undertake work on repairing damage to the West Kennet Avenue on the B4003 with the condition that an acceptable methodology statement is submitted to EH. EH has worked hard to achieve a solution to this including offering to pay for additional materials such as sterile chalk necessary for the repairs.

3. WHS Steering Committee Representative's Report

TRO

CS reported that at the last Steering Committee the response of the Wiltshire Council to the Committee's request for a permanent traffic restriction order (TRO) was presented. Wiltshire Council would only be able to consider this approach if damage demonstrated that it was required.

NT CMP

The NT Conservation Management Plan produced by Atkins has been completed. CS commented that it appeared to have a bias towards nature conservation.

Governance Review

Initial comments were sought on the brief for the governance review for both halves of the World Heritage Site. AC added that the review will examine the governance structures including the role of the groups, their membership and chairs. Avebury's management structure was put in place in the early '90's and has evolved without review since then. There are a number of differences in the approach to management in the two halves of the Site for example although local government officers are represented on the management groups at Avebury there is no councillor representation as at Stonehenge. UNESCO is also interested in the reasons why the two halves are managed separately which the review should articulate. In addition the changing management context such as the creation of the unitary authority in Wiltshire makes it an opportune moment to undertake a review.

Input on the draft brief has been requested from the Steering Committee. It has not yet been put out to tender. Once the consultant begins work questionnaires will be sent out to members of all groups. The report on outcomes will be made to the two steering committees which will consider the findings. GS requested that questionnaires should not be purely tick box but include open questions allowing for the expression of opinions. MPK recommended that consultants with experience of working with WHS's other than Stonehenge and Avebury be invited to tender. AC added that funding

is available for the review in 2010 -11. It is estimated that it will be completed within a 6 month period.

An exchange visit of Stonehenge and Avebury Steering Committees will take place in May to encourage mutual understanding of current management challenges and governance arrangements prior to the review.

Excessive Signage

CS reported that concern was raised over increasing signage in the car park and farmyard area. SG, the NT property manager, informed the group that there was no policy on this and an enthusiastic temporary visitor services manager (VSM) had developed this signage and that a more strategic approach would be likely to be taken next year on the return of the permanent VSM. SG added that the trees north of the henge screening the mobile home park would need to be managed and this would be discussed with the Parish Council.

HER

AC was asked to clarify the arrangements on the liaison process for updating data required for the HER and also the process in place for identifying and addressing discrepancies. AC to report back to the next Steering Committee.

Action: AC to ensure that governance review questionnaires include open questions.

All to send suggestions regarding suitable consultants to AC

4. Monitoring of the Resource Agenda

4.1 Research Agenda Update

SS reported that the project design for the update of the Research Agenda has now been submitted to HEEP for formal appraisal. The project design is for stage 1 (Resource Assessment). Following advice stage 2, the update of the agenda and strategy sections, will be submitted once the update of the Resource Assessment is near completion. After further discussions with different advisors in EH, it was decided to put everything necessary to fulfil the objectives set out in the previously approved project outline/proposal back into the project design. HEEP will respond highlighting what funding is considered feasible. Outcomes are still far from certain but thank you very much to JL and AC for helping to highlight the funding requirements to achieve the objectives identified in the project outline that emerged from the review of the original Agenda.

SS was advised that the seminars in Stage 1 were very unlikely to be funded so they have been replaced with an expert review symposium to provide an end date and a chance to review the work. The projected due dates for authors of the chapter updates is October, and December for new chapters. The symposium could then take place in February and PDF versions

of the resource assessment produced by the end of March. Timings are dependent on the outcome of the funding proposal with HEEP.

The project board identified at the last meeting of AAHRG held their first meeting on 22 December 2009. At the meeting lead authors were identified for each chapter as well as expert consultees who the lead author can invite to contribute to the chapter. The lead authors will be invited to contribute shortly by SS to initiate the process in the absence of the coordinator for whom funding is being sought from HEEP. Consultees will be contacted after lead authors are in place. A brief and style sheet for contributors has been prepared by members of the Project Board and this will be sent to contributors once they have agreed to participate.

4.2 GIS update

SS reported that she had managed to secure some funding from Wiltshire Council to cover this element. She will need to meet MPK and the audit officer, Sarah McLean to review the scale of work necessary for the update of the SMR to be fed into the Avebury GIS and from there provided to authors to inform their work. The update will also form the basis for published maps in the Research Framework.

5. Current archaeological & historical research

5.1 Proposal for Evaluation of the Romano-British settlement in the fields south of Silbury Hill

Vicky Crosby and Nicola Hembrey – EH Research Dept, Archaeological Projects Team

We hope to carry out a research project to evaluate the recently-revealed Romano-British settlement in the fields south of Silbury Hill and to assess the existing material from earlier excavations. Its aims are to characterise the settlement itself and to elucidate a poorly understood phase of activity around the monument and within the wider Avebury World Heritage Site. In addition, there are some puzzling features in the water meadow which we will also investigate, and we propose to excavate a trench to examine the deposits across the floodplain in order to date the soil formations.

The settlement was unexpectedly discovered by geophysical survey (part of the Silbury Hill Conservation Project) carried out in October 2006. Considerable detail was visible in the magnetic survey, which appears to show a Roman settlement initially described as 'ladder style'. A large scale GPR (ground penetrating radar) survey confirmed the presence of masonry buildings. While these results were unexpected, the presence of Romano-British settlement in these fields was known since the later 19th century, when wells and 'kitchen-middens' were excavated. One of the 'kitchen-middens'

was a substantial pit containing refuse the presence of worked stone, large nails and roofing tiles in the wells indicated the presence of substantial masonry buildings.

The second driver is the Romano-British finds from the Hill and its ditch, which had received little attention in Whittle's publication of Atkinson's excavations, and which Nicola will be reporting on in the forthcoming Conservation Project monograph. They drew attention to the finds from the wells and other features around the hill, and the need to understand the nature of Romano-British activity around Silbury Hill to interpret the assemblage and put it in context.

In terms of the EH Research Agenda, the main aim of the proposed archaeological evaluation is to characterise the settlement (SHAPE sub-programme number 1111.130): "development of a sound evidence base for specific locales and historic assets in order to ensure appropriate management information is available and effective communication possible to community". This will inform the designation process. We also hope to address some research questions relating to this settlement in its contemporary setting, including its relationships to the prehistoric monument which must have dominated the physical landscape. We shall look at the preservation of archaeological deposits in relation to current land use.

The Roman period is a little-understood phase of Silbury Hill and its immediate surroundings, and, as the Avebury WHS Research Agenda notes, both the Roman ritual reuse of monuments and understanding settlement morphology are high priorities for investigation.

Please note that this project is currently at the proposal stage; we hope that we will shortly be able to produce a Project Design, outlining four stages: a desk based assessment and recording of existing material; an archaeological evaluation (pencilled in for five weeks in August and early September 2010); possible fieldwalking, in which we would hope to involve the local community; analysis and dissemination.

The response from AAHRG was very positive, and expressed a strong wish to see the evaluation include the land to the north of the road and east of Silbury Hill. We are also keen on this idea, and will explore it at the Project Design stage. We would like to thank AAHRG for their time, as well as their constructive comments.

In addition the archaeological knowledge, experience and suggestions provided by AAHRG and noted by VC and NH issues regarding the need for security were noted as the work will be clearly visible from the road. There is also the intention to inform and engage the local community with the project. JG commented that WAHNS archaeology field group would be interested in volunteering on the project.

Action: All to send in any further written comments to VC and NH to assist in shaping the project design

5.2 Bridgemead

AC reported that according to the Landscape of the Megaliths it appears that Bridgemead sits a little to the north of the route of the Beckhampton Avenue although this is not certain. DV reported that a new planning application was going to be submitted with a different footprint from the existing building and planning permissions given. A geophysical survey is being done in advance of submission. The application will present an opportunity to evaluate the garden area, not looked at before, as part of the process. JG reported that the applicant was a local person keen to explore what is on the site.

5.3 Archiving of Research Data Experimental Earthwork

GS reported that Katy Whittaker, as part of a twelve month sabbatical from the NMR, is doing a masters at Exeter. As part of her research she is undertaking an assessment of the Experimental Earthwork Project archive. The work involves a thorough indexing project of the mixed media archive. The process will enable an assessment of or the future use and placement of the archive. It can then be made publicly available in the most appropriate format which might be through the NMR or an alternative platform.

Some control samples are with GS but others such as the original flint samples are not with the main archive. MA offered to ascertain where relevant environmental samples might be. There may be some elements at the Institute of Archaeology.

JG raised concerns about the current condition of the experimental earthwork reporting that fences were down and bullocks risked destroying the entire experiment. GS said that contractors were currently unable to get machinery to the site to re fence it due to the ground conditions.

Paul Ashbee Archive

GS is undertaking a similar assessment of the Paul Ashbee archive. The written archive could go to either the NMR or WAHNS library. Duplicates can be disseminated. RC holds finds from the Horslip Barrow excavation and would like to receive the associated written archive for the AK Museum. The review of the archive will consider where it would be best deposited. The AK Museum, Devizes and Salisbury might all be appropriate for the Wiltshire elements and will be consulted in the process.

6. Review of Current Opportunities for Dissemination of Research

6.1 Stonehenge and Avebury Research Seminar

The seminar organised by JL and DD will take place on May 22nd. AC suggested that AAHRG be named as a collaborator in the seminar. She added that the seminar should be a pilot for a yearly one bringing together the two halves of the WHS as favoured by UNESCO. GS suggested that adding AARHG should open up future seminars to periods other than purely the Prehistoric. SS suggested that the wording World Heritage Site appear in the relation to the seminar and that the WHS logo is used. AC stated that she will draw attention to the Avebury Research Agenda as the first example, globally, for a WHS. JP added that the time keeping will need to be tight for the very full agenda.

7. Review of Membership

New Members

AC suggested that NH and VC join AAHRG at least for the duration of the research project on the Romano-British Settlement. They accepted.

Convenor Pool

BE suggested MPK be invited as a third convenor as part of the revolving convenor approach suggested for AAHRG in the new TOR. MA suggested a pool of convenors allowing one of them to step in at short notice. MPK agreed to be part of the pool. AC supported the pool approach which can be reviewed in future if necessary.

8. Review of content of report to WHS Steering Committee

Progress on the Research Agenda update should be reported to the SC in May.

9. Date of next meeting

10.00 AM **Thursday 15th July in Avebury Study Centre.** In the afternoon there will be a visit to the excavation in Marden.

10. Other research opportunities (i.e. utilities, development control issues)

10.1 Chestnut Avenue felling and replanting

NS reported on the felling. The work was necessary due disease and the risk of accident. The trees are on NT land and on adjoining land belonging to Robert Cooper. Archaeological mitigation was carried out in the form of an auguring survey conducted by MA and a watching brief undertaken by JG and his colleagues.

Avebury Chestnut Avenue interim geoarchaeology statement

A rapid appraisal of the geoarchaeology Chestnut Avenue, Avebury was undertaken in advance of replanting. Hand augering was conducted using a 4cm diameter Dutch auger, and a total of 37 auger holes (of the 42 planting

points) were completed representing *c.* 21.5m of recorded sediment. All 21 locations on the east side of the avenue were augered and recorded, and the southern-most 16 on the west side.

Although coring was conducted close to the road, no evidence of any disturbance of addition from the road was encountered in any auger hole. Despite the proximity of roots, augering rarely encountered, or was impeded by, large roots.

The sequences

In general sequences were up to *c.* 0.7m deep, and a colluvial horizon survived under the A horizon (topsoil) in most locations. Colluvium overlay soft weathered chalk / calcareous chalky periglacial solfluction material. The colluvium was essentially stone-free but with few very small chalk pieces or chalk flecking. On the eastern side overall colluvium was deeper with very shallow depths at the southern end of the avenue being 0.35m, increasing to *c.* 0.65m where horizonation was recorded possibly indicating stratified colluvium of a feature. Northwards colluvium was generally 0.6 to 0.8m deep. The west, downslope side, colluvium was initially shallow (*c.* 0.4m), becoming slightly deeper (0.50-0.6m) as the avenue moved upslope towards to road. This indicates a lynchet parallel with and under the present road.

Finds

Artefacts were recorded in the following:-

- 4E fine charcoal flecks @ 20cm
- 7E charcoal fragments (not oak) @ 26cm
- 7E minute pottery fragment @ 35cm
- 9E small blade fragment @ 59cm
- 9W fine charcoal flecks @ 30-36cm
- 10W cbm @34cm

Implications

The augering did not reveal any significant archaeology, nor was there anything of specific archaeological note at the southern end near the henge bank.

Few charcoal fragments and isolated artefacts were recorded.

The results indicate a colluvial bank, possibly a lynchet upon which the road sites, abruptly becoming shallower westwards. This can be seen as clear feature in the field.

Prehistoric archaeological features (should any exist) may be sealed and protected by the colluvium.

If the colluvial bank lies under, and pre-dates the avenue/access into the northern sector of the henge, then it suggests that there had been erosion

period to the construction of the henge (c. 2600 BC). We may suggested therefore a phase of deforestation (if the area was ever wooded (Allen & Gardiner 2009), followed by tillage and lynchet formation. It is planned to investigate this lynchet further under a broader research remit.

Watching Brief

JG commented that the trees replanted were smaller than planned and therefore narrower holes of only 25 cm were required. Only topsoil was disturbed and therefore nothing of archaeological note uncovered.

Action: Add further investigation to the update of the Research Agenda

Replanting and Woodland Strategy

Debate over replanting of the Avenue of trees followed. CS raised concerns over the lack of a landscape impact studies to ascertain whether replanting should have been undertaken and over the choice of lime trees and their impact. Differences of opinion were expressed regarding the value of the avenue of trees as a landscape feature and the desirability of newly opened up views from the henge to Windmill Hill in place. Concerns were raised that opening up would also highlight intrusions of building along the A4361 including the new Bonds Garage development. The revealed panorama appears to have both positive and negative landscape impacts. SS reported that a WHS is considered a sensitive area according to the 1999 Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations on Forestry and afforestation could be subject to an EIA without a lower threshold however it was unclear that replanting constituted afforestation which appeared to refer to new planting.

CS underlined his concerns regarding the choice lime and potential root damage from mature trees. MA replied that lime is better in prehistoric landscape and actually less damaging than chestnut based on a Forestry Commission damage survey he assisted on. He also confirmed that the chestnut roots had not caused significant damage.

SS suggested that the issue be reviewed as part of the forthcoming woodland strategy which should provide a framework for such decisions based on consultation, appropriate assessments and landscape planning. The production of this strategy should involve the National Trust, the Forestry Commission, the NWD AONB and local landowners.

MA underlined the complexity of decisions related to woodland citing the trees on Kings Barrows Ridge. A decision to remove the trees from the barrows and plant between them has interfered with archaeological evidence in this area. CS suggested that in an archaeological WHS archaeological values should be prioritised. AC said that some woodland such as that at Kings Barrow Ridge is actually grade 2* listed in the Register of Parks and Gardens complicating decisions. The significance needs to be carefully

assessed. MA added that there may be different views among archaeologists on the matter adding further complexity. SS suggested the Woodland Strategy would need to address this complexity and seek an appropriate balance. The meeting agreed that a Woodland Strategy is the right way forward.

CS requested that the wood be burnt well away from the monument to prevent any future interference with geophysical surveys.

Traffic calming at Beckhampton

SS reported on traffic calming scheme planned for Beckhampton that on the advice of the county archaeology department would have no archaeological impact but represents an urban intrusion and additional clutter on the A4. She has sent comments to the relevant director at Wiltshire Council.

Condition Survey

AC reported that the condition survey which provides the baseline for informing UNESCO of the state of conservation of the WHS requires updating. EH will be funding an update across the whole WHS to be completed in the next financial year. The brief is currently out to tender and there have been a number of responses. A detailed methodology needs to be worked up by the chosen contractor incorporating all work carried out up to now. BE requested that the condition and appearance of modern interventions such as the concrete at West Kennet long barrow be examined as part of the survey. AC confirmed that this would be considered separately as part of planned repairs and belonged rather to concerns regarding authenticity and integrity rather than the condition survey. MPK added that the condition survey normally dealt with field monuments and their external condition.

Concrete setting of obelisk

NS reported that a student will be undertaking a review of the concrete mixture forming the setting of one of the obelisks to check its potential to fail.

West Kennet Avenue Damage Report

The HEFA has undertaken an assessment of the damage to the scheduled monument caused by the B4003. The road has widened measurably since the early nineties. The road is used by buses and this is probably a cause of much of the damage. A formal damage assessment can now be used to raise the issue with Highways. BE reported that he had seen cars regularly parked behind the double yellow lines. NS added that where some obelisks were leaning they had been hit by flails of agricultural machinery. CS said the verges were very soft and that the narrowness of the road meant that passing cars push each other up onto the banks eating away at the monument. AC commented that making the road one way seemed to be an ideal solution.

Action: All to send before and after pictures of West Kennet Avenue and damage to the verges

11. Final Review of the Report to WHS Steering Committee

- Report the need to take action to prevent damage to the West Kennet Avenue including diverting bus routes and making the road one way.
- The support for a Woodland Strategy and suggestions on partners to be involved.
- Progress on Research Agenda update

12. AOB

Visitor Centre

BE enquired whether planning permission had been granted for the Stonehenge Visitor Centre. There are still some issues to be resolved the planners' decision and the committee's decision. The traffic restriction order is still in process.

Residents' Pack in ConBull

SS reported that her article on the Residents' Pack project is in the current edition of the Conservation Bulletin.

Great Stones Way

JG reported that the feasibility study for the Great Stones Way is due to be completed in mid- March. Two difficult crossing points have been identified: one of the A303 and the other of the A4 between Overton Hill and the Sanctuary. SS commented that establishing a safe crossing point at the latter is an objective in the Management Plan and she would be happy to discuss strategies to address this with those working on the Great Stones Way project.