



department for  
**culture, media  
and sport**

# news release

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## **GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCE NEXT STEPS ON STONEHENGE VISITOR CENTRE**

A new visitor centre to help bring alive the mystery and majesty of Stonehenge, the UK's internationally renowned World Heritage Site, was given the go-ahead in principle today by the Government.

The Stonehenge Programme Board, chaired by the Culture Minister, Barbara Follett, and Transport Minister, Andrew Adonis, has recommended that the centre, costing up to £25m, should be built at Airman's Corner. The way is now clear for work to be done on working up a design, seeking planning permission and raising funding to deliver the project.

Funding will be provided through a range of private and public sources, including English Heritage, Heritage Lottery Fund, Highways Agency, Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Transport. The level of public funds committed

will be conditional on meeting the rigorous requirements for approving major public projects. The Government also announced that the site will be further enhanced by closing the A344 which at present takes traffic very close to the stones.

Culture Secretary Andy Burnham said:

"Stonehenge has fascinated and enthralled people for thousands of years. It is undoubtedly one of the world's key heritage sites, and a preeminent UK visitor attraction. I am delighted that we have been able to identify a sustainable and affordable solution for a visitor centre at one of the world's key heritage sites, and one of the UK's most iconic visitor attractions. Today's announcement marks the first steps towards making long held aspirations for Stonehenge a reality, and could not have been achieved without the commitment, determination and passion of our partners. "

Barbara Follett said:

"Stonehenge is our most important and well recognised prehistoric site and, as such, is absolutely at the heart of our national history and heritage. Everyone agrees, however, that the way it is presented to visitors is far short of ideal. Consensus on how to improve visitor facilities has eluded stakeholders for far too long, and so I am delighted that we now have plans to move forward. There is still a long way to go, of course, but we now have to get on with making it happen"

The chosen site at Airman's Corner is about 1.5 miles west from the current site, at the edge of the World Heritage Site and has good access to the stones.

English Heritage Chairman, Professor Sir Barry Cunliffe, said:

"Our vision for Stonehenge has always been a simple one: to restore a sense of dignity and wonder to its setting, and provide visitors with a really high quality experience. I believe the plans announced today will do this, and significantly improve what we have there at present."

Dame Fiona Reynolds, Director General of the National Trust, added:

"The new facilities will greatly improve the experience for the many thousands of visitors to Stonehenge, while the other planned work has the potential to really improve the wider setting of the monument itself. We look forward to working with English Heritage and the other partners in this project to help take it forward."

#### **NOTES TO EDITORS**

Today's announcement marks approval in principle for the project and is, of course, still subject to a detailed business case, planning permission and funding.

The Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites World Heritage Site (WHS) was inscribed in 1986. The part of the WHS around Stonehenge itself contains one of the richest concentrations of early prehistoric monuments in the world. At the time of inscription the UK provided assurances to UNESCO that the closure of the A344 road which crosses the avenue at Stonehenge was receiving serious consideration as part of the overall plans for the future management of the site.

Since 1986, English Heritage and successive government ministers have pledged commitment to improving the standards of

presentation and facilities at Stonehenge and taking the roads out of the landscape. Most recently, in line with the vision outlined by the Stonehenge Management Plan published in 2000, two major projects were planned: to remove the roads from around Stonehenge by placing the A303 in a tunnel, and to relocate visitor facilities to a new centre away from the Stones. Public inquiries were held into each and the outcomes reviewed at length.

In 2007 the Government announced that it would not continue with a published scheme of a 2.1km bored tunnel for the A303 in view of the estimated cost of around £500m. However, the Government made a commitment to review the Management Plan and to complete environmental improvements at Stonehenge, including new visitor facilities. A Project board was re-convened, jointly chaired by the Ministers for Culture and Transport and a Project Implementation Group (PIG), reporting to the Board, was charged with delivery of environmental improvements. English Heritage was tasked with revising the Management Plan.

In December 2008, following public consultation of the future of Stonehenge, two options for the location of a new visitor centre were proposed by the PIG: Fargo Plantation and Airman's Corner. These options were carefully considered by the Stonehenge Project Board which subsequently recommended to Ministers the Airman's Corner option with low impact transit arrangements to a point near the Stones.

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