



ENGLISH HERITAGE

## NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

# **ENGLISH HERITAGE WELCOMES STONEHENGE DECISION**

English Heritage welcomed the Government's decision today (Wednesday 13 May, 2009) on the location of new visitor facilities for Stonehenge. Together with integrated proposals to close the A344, this decision will improve the monument's setting and presentation to visitors.

Professor Sir Barry Cunliffe, Chairman, English Heritage, said: "Our vision has always been to restore a sense of dignity to the setting of Stonehenge and to improve its visitor facilities.

"English Heritage has now secured, through working with the Department of Culture Media and Sport and a group of leading stakeholders, an agreed location for new visitor facilities in accordance with the World Heritage Site Management Plan. This will lead to a pragmatic and affordable scheme which will make significant and vitally-needed improvements to what we have now."

The chosen site, Airman's Corner, is about 2.5km (1.5 miles) west from the current visitor centre, on the junction of the A344 and A360. It is at the edge of the World Heritage Site and has good access to the Stones. The decision has been welcomed by The National Trust,

the UK Commission for UNESCO, the South West of England Regional Development Agency, and South West Tourism.

The scheme will include an efficient, all-weather visitor transit system, offering visitors the convenience of being dropped off near the monument. It is envisaged the new site will enable increased educational and interpretation facilities.

Sir Barry added: "Airman's Corner had wide support and is the unanimous recommendation of the project team – it is easily accessible by road, virtually uninhabited and supported by the major heritage groups and the landowners. The new centre will be designed by Denton Corker Marshall and will pay special regard to the sensitive landscape and other environmental issues.

"I congratulate the Government for making this decisive and timely move. It is in the public interest for everyone who cares about Stonehenge and its conservation to be united in supporting this scheme and ensuring that the project is successfully delivered on time."

Dame Fiona Reynolds, Director General of the National Trust, said: "We are delighted by this latest step forward in developing a new visitor centre for Stonehenge and improving the surrounding landscape. The new facilities will significantly enhance the experience for the many thousands of visitors to this important landmark and the other planned work has the potential to greatly improve the setting of the monument. We look forward to working with English Heritage and other partners in helping take the project forward."

### **Closure of the A344**

The A344/A303 junction (Stonehenge Bottom) will be closed, and the section of the A344 from Stonehenge Bottom to the Stones will be decommissioned and grassed over. This would reunite Stonehenge with the ancient processional Avenue and improve the setting of the monument. The junction closure will also eliminate a traffic black spot, leading to fewer accidents on this part of the A303. The remaining part of the A344 will be the route for the visitor shuttle service between Airman's Corner visitor centre and the Stones.

## **Timetable**

A planning application will be submitted in the summer, when there will be further public consultation on the scheme. Construction work is expected to take place in 2011, with the new visitor facilities scheduled to open in 2012, in time for the London Olympics.

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**For further press information please contact Renee Fok, English Heritage Corporate Communications, on 0207 973 3297 or at [renee.fok@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:renee.fok@english-heritage.org.uk)**

## **Supporting quotes:**

Sue Davies, culture committee chair for the **UK National Commission for UNESCO**, said: "The improvements offered by the Airman's Corner proposal are long overdue - the current environment around Stonehenge is a disgrace and urgent action is required.

"This option will allow for much-improved conservation by allowing for the restoration of grasslands and a higher quality experience for visitors, many of whom see Stonehenge as a symbol of Britain. We look forward to its successful completion - as an international icon, Stonehenge both needs and deserves the investment."

Juliet Williams, Chairman of **The South West of England Regional Development Agency**, said: "We strongly support significant improvement of the visitor facilities at Stonehenge. The Stones are one of the nation's most important cultural landmarks and we shall work with our partners to do all that we can to realise the plans set out today. We are committed to giving visitors to the South West the very best experience and thereby encouraging more people to come and enjoy our spectacular and compelling region."

Martin Bell, Director of **South West Tourism**, said: "Stonehenge is a key gateway to the South West and an the icon that helps us sell all the other wonderful heritage offerings our region has to offer and yet, for all to many years, the visitor experience has been marred by the proximity to the road and the associate traffic distraction. That is why this

announcement is really welcomed and we cannot wait for the work to start and more importantly completed.”

Mike Heyworth, Director, **Council for British Archaeology**, said: “The CBA welcomes this decision as part of a sustainable 21st-century solution to the dual challenges of improving visitor access and conservation for this outstandingly important World Heritage Site. We applaud the Government's support, and the commitment of the project's partners, in taking the first step towards creating the public facilities and environmental improvement that Stonehenge's world class archaeological landscape deserves.”

Stephen Quinlan, Director of **Denton Corker Marshall**, said: “We are delighted to be working on Stonehenge once again, and we very much look forward to working with English Heritage. This project has always been close to our hearts and is especially interesting. For a long time there has been a need to find an appropriate solution for the visitor facilities, and we are very pleased to have the opportunity to help provide one.”