

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

New visitor centre welcomed as key step towards Stonehenge improvements

London, UK – 13 May 2009. The new Stonehenge visitor centre, which was given the go-ahead in principle by the Government today, is key to improving public access to this internationally renowned site. The UK National Commission for UNESCO welcomes this announcement and calls on all parties to work to ensure the successful completion of the visitor centre project.

"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," says Sue Davies, chair of the Culture Committee of the UK National Commission for UNESCO. "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."

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 also been welcomed by The National Trust, the South West of England Regional Development Agency, and South West Tourism, among others.

The announcement marks approval in principle for the project and is still subject to a detailed business case, planning permission and funding.

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Notes to Editors

For further information, please contact Ian White at the UK National Commission for UNESCO on +44 (0)207 766 3492 or iwhite@unesco.org.uk.

- *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. Following consideration by the Stonehenge Project Board, the Airman's Corner option was subsequently recommended to Ministers.*
- **The UK National Commission for UNESCO** is the focal point in the UK for UNESCO-related policies and activities. As an independent body, the UK National Commission brings together a network of nearly 250 experts from across the UK in the fields of education, culture, sciences and communication. Working closely in partnership with HM Government and UK civil society, the UK National Commission aims to provide expert advice to Government on UNESCO related matters, develop UK input into UNESCO policy-making and programme implementation, promote reforms within UNESCO, and encourage support in the UK for UNESCO's ideals and work.

- **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.
- 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.