

**NOTE ABOUT A MEETING OF THE AVEBURY WHS STEERING COMMITTEE: 20 OCTOBER
2022**

Held at the Wiltshire Museum and online and chaired by Henry Oliver (NWDONB), Robin Butler (representing landowners), Stephen Thomas (Avebury Society) and Stephen Stacey (APC) attended from Avebury with Jayne Drew for KVPC. Representatives of Wiltshire Council (including Cllr Jane Davies), English Heritage Trust, Historic England, ASAHRG, and the chair of the WHS Partnership Panel (Emma Sayer) were present.

The purpose of the meeting was to receive an update on a project to review the governance of the WHS, and in particular reactions to its proposed option 1; hear a compromise proposal from Wiltshire; and consider what interest there was in setting up a charity (specifically a Charitable Incorporated Organisation or CIO) to provide a governance structure for the WHS in place of the ‘big four’ (Wiltshire Council, the National Trust, English Heritage, and Historic England) and parish councils and other interest groups (mainly landowners and archaeologists).

The review, funded by Lottery money, has been in train for four years. APC’s contribution throughout has been to insist on proper local representation to assist in guiding and managing the WHS. This approach was strongly supported at the meeting by landowner and parish council representatives amongst others.

The author of the governance review had reflected this input by suggesting that “the community” and landowners should be represented in the governance machinery. In what the review called option 1, APC and the landowners would have one representative each on the partnership panel, one on the executive board, and two on the advisory board. These representatives would be chosen by a small group of “community champions” and “landowner champions.” Presumably the selected community champion might not need to be a member of APC.

The review’s author conceded that this model was complex; in my view it is unworkable. There is today neither a forum of “community champions” nor of “landowner champions.” It

would be difficult, and in reality impossible, to create ones that can earn the respect and trust of the community. What would the mandate be for a champion? Who would confirm it? To whom would the champions report? How would they identify let alone “champion” the interests of their community or of landowners? The only legitimate expression of the will of the community is the parish council. The expression may be imperfect but it has the great merit of actually existing with an established process in which members of the community can engage if they so wish. It is formally and actually democratic. Why invent something new when it is not needed?

In any case it became clear during discussion that there was no consensus on the partnership panel for the review’s option 1. Accordingly Wiltshire Council offered what it described as a compromise. The essence of this compromise was a reduction in the size of the executive board from nine to seven by cutting the number of ‘community champions’ and ‘landowner champions’ from two each to one each.

Wiltshire argued for its compromise on the grounds of efficiency. Participants pointed out that executive boards larger than seven can be very efficient; they also regretted the weakening of local voices, whether those of the landowners or the community. Another participant remarked that accepting Wiltshire’s compromise would be a step backwards as we had been moving from a bureaucratic model of governance to a communitarian one. It was noted by others that a board of seven would give the ‘big four’ an in-built majority. Wiltshire suggested that the so-called compromise needed further work.

As Wiltshire’s compromise was based on so-called option 1, which the partnership panel had not been able to agree, the meeting decided that it would not be a good use of time to pursue it further. Instead they agreed to consider whether a CIO might be a viable model. This not straightforward: the CIO would have to bear the significant staff costs of the Coordination Unit from the start. There would also be further challenges in raising funds in order to take on other costs from the ‘big four’. However the feeling was that, after a review of four years (producing valuable information but not creating consensus), a new approach was needed. Emma Sayer said that she would reflect on this proposal and, following the

Stonehenge Steering Committee meeting early in November, would come back to us with a way forward.

20 October 2022