



## ***Update from the National Trust***

The National Trust is an independent conservation charity that was founded in 1895 on the simple and enduring premise that people need historic, beautiful and natural places. We look after some 650,000 acres of land, over 500 historic houses, 775 miles of coastline, and help to manage 10 World Heritage Sites. The comparatively small core of just 10,000 staff is supported by over 60,000 volunteers and over 4 million members.

The Wiltshire Landscape team are responsible for looking after NT sites across the county, including over 3,500 acres of land and property in the WHS, some 1,800 acres of land of Special Scientific Interest across about a dozen sites, numerous listed buildings and the Accredited Alexander Keiller Museum (AKM).

Here at Avebury, the National Trust has once again delivered exemplary conservation and engagement work, welcoming over 100,000 visitors to our Farmyard site, and significantly more to our open access land, including the Avebury Stone Circle.

We have continued to support the Parish through the provision of the Community Shop, the Post Office, offering free access to the AKM, giving talks and lectures to local groups (including talks to the Kennet Valley NT Association and the annual Avebury Society Lecture) and by supporting the local community through foot patrols and litter-picking throughout the year, and especially by providing extensive support and resources at key Observances, notably Solstice.

In addition, we have helped the Avebury Community Sports and Recreation Committee to fund their new notice board at the sports field, provided a unique tour of Avebury Manor for the Auction of Promises, once again helped to organise and host the village Wassail, and are looking forward to supporting both the upcoming Avebury Rocks and Avebury Day. During the final year of excavation on the Avenue, we hosted special visits for local residents and groups, providing a 'behind the wire' tour for our neighbours.

The Museum has continued to be popular with schools (particularly primary schools) and colleges which are now required to include Stone Age to Iron Age on the history curriculum. In the first year of the new curriculum the AKM saw 5,507 students visiting across all levels of education, including many from Wiltshire schools. Entrance is free to educational groups, but many schools also take our optional talks and tours. Circles Nursery visit the open areas of the site throughout the year and particularly look forward to visiting the Manor at Christmas, enjoying songs and stories amongst the decorations of the period. Each year the Museum and Manor accept secondary school students from local schools for work experience and are currently preparing for five to come in June and July for a week on site.

In terms of conservation, survey work has re-confirmed that water voles are breeding on the River Kennet. This is excellent and exciting news after a long dry run, and we will continue to monitor progress. Please look out for more information in our newsletters.

Through prudent financial management we were able to built up sufficient resources to rethatch the cart shed at West Kennett Farm, and continue to work to find a solution to the ongoing challenge of jackdaw damage to thatch on the threshing barn in the Farmyard.

We also carried out extensive improvements to the main visitor car park. Maintenance of this area is a real challenge as we're restricted in the type of surface dressing and working practices that are appropriate within the WHS. That said, we have identified funding for regular maintenance in coming months, and now have sufficient monies to refurbish our toilets. The programme of works is currently being drawn up by our Building Surveyor and is planned to be delivered in 2016.

Recognising the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our inscription as a WHS, we recently launched "The Stonehenge & Avebury Walking Challenge", setting a challenge for people to walk eight routes across both halves of the WHS. The walks follow ancient routes, sharing facts and stories about the amazing landscape and wildlife of the area.

The current presentation of Avebury Manor continues to be popular with visitors, allowing them to enjoy this property in a unique way. The team have welcomed visitors from around the world, and continue to respond to their insightful questions about the lives and times of those who once lived here, including Alexander Keiller.

In the Garden, the new team are tackling the significant problem of box blight in a professional and sustainable manner. In addition, we are progressing major changes and improvements in management and horticultural practice. We have identified a sum of money to improve the walls and paths, and this work is due to be completed in 2016.

Across the estate, we reviewed and removed signs from many areas, and will be leading on the wider interpretation strategy as part of our commitment to the WHS Management Plan. We have also completed phase one of our strategy to improve interpretation across NT countryside sites, installing panels at The Coombes, Lockeridge and Cherhill Down.

Fund raising is a vital part of our work to allow us to deliver conservation across the whole portfolio. In the shop, we've introduced exciting new products, including a range of plants, as well as introducing more local products and a wider range of Avebury related gifts.

The Catering Team introduced new seasonal dishes in the Circles Cafe and are baking delicious cakes for our wonderful tea-room in the Manor. We're working towards the ambitious target of achieving the Soil Association's "Food for Life" catering mark, demonstrating our high environmental standards in buying and producing our food.

Finally, the NT team hope very much that you will join us for an Open Evening on 19 May so we can share a little more of our work, and hear your thoughts and ideas about how we might work together more closely as neighbours. Please see the attached invitation.