

Summer Solstice at Avebury 2021 (21 June)
Solstice events 18 - 21 June
Overview of current plans

1. Summary
2. 2021 Solstice and Current Government Covid-19 Rules
3. Current responses from involved parties/organisations
4. Lessons learned from past Solstice events
5. Covid-specific issues and considerations for Avebury Parish Council

1. Summary

- Solstice 2021 always poses a range of challenges at Avebury, not least because
 - it is a public, open access space centred on a residential village
 - there is no specific managed ownership of the 4-day festivities
 - attendance is unpredictable
 - even so, police security, St John ambulance, parking and a range of other facilities have to be provided at significant cost
 - and oversight of events depends on the co-operation of a number of different parties/organisations
- 2021 is further complicated by the rules and uncertainties created by the Covid pandemic
- As of May 1st, most involved parties are saying they do not yet have detailed plans in place for 2021 but are 'waiting to see' what happens on, and a few weeks after, Government Covid announcements on 17th May
- Current Covid restrictions mean that people should not be gathering in large numbers until planned relaxation of that rule at 00.01 hours on 21st June
- However, many people - and particularly young people - are eager to return to something approaching 'normality' and may well ignore Government guidelines
- This could mean that many people attend even on the 18/19/20 June before restrictions are lifted, especially if the weather is fine
- Moreover, in spite of lockdown, there have been a number of unscheduled gatherings/protests in relation to climate change, 'Me Too', Black Lives Matter etc
- Although faith and other groups are not promoting Solstice attendance at Avebury, a review of travel websites shows that Solstice at Stonehenge and Avebury is being promoted, often with out of date information, and hardly any mention of Covid

Approved and adopted 18 May 2021

- So the challenge for all involved parties at Avebury this year is
 - to estimate likely attendance at Avebury over the 4-day Solstice period
 - to anticipate any particular problems that could arise re Covid safety
 - to anticipate the possibility of protest gatherings unrelated to Solstice
- In formulating local Action Plans, it will be important to remain strictly within the Government's legal Covid guidelines, even though the picture is constantly changing
- This indicates that at present, Avebury PC - and general policy - should probably be to discourage public attendance at Avebury over Solstice, or at least until 21 June, and to promote the live streaming that will take place from Stonehenge
- However, while discouraging unpermitted attendance, the Parish Council and other parties need to assess whether large numbers will attend and to plan accordingly based on the experience of previous years

2. 2021 Solstice and Current Government Covid-19 Rules

- While Solstice celebrations cover 18, 19, 20, and 21 June, actual Summer Solstice is at 04,31 on 21 June 2021
- Government Covid guidelines are that from 17 May (Step 3 out of Lockdown) 'most legal restrictions on meeting others outdoors will be lifted although gatherings of over 30 people will remain illegal'
- Unless otherwise advised, people should continue to social distance and wear masks (currently under review)
- From 21 June (Step 4), Government hopes to ease restrictions on large events (subject to research to test outcomes from gatherings) while still complying with advice on 'hands, face, space' and Covid-Secure measures for business

3. Current responses from involved parties/organisations

- Contact with a wide range of people and organisations involved in Avebury Solstice indicates a great level of uncertainty over what to expect this year (eg English Heritage, National Trust, Wiltshire Police, Kennet Valley PC, ASSF, Maria Shepherdson, local farming and business communities)
- English Heritage 'will not be issuing a public statement for some while' - waiting on May 17th announcements. Likewise National Trust and Wiltshire Police who will issue General Orders two weeks before the event. ASSF will be meeting on

18 May to formulate faith group activity on sacred sites in the light of the Government's 17 May announcements

- Although formal plans are not in place, all parties are giving serious thought to the likelihood of high numbers of visitors over the whole Solstice period, for example:
 - English Heritage will again be live streaming Solstice sunrise from Stonehenge and encouraging people to participate by viewing
 - NT anticipate 'at least the usual security presence over Solstice'
 - Wiltshire Police expect provision will be similar to previous years
 - Maria Shepherdson expects that the Church will offer some element of triage facilities
 - Businesses - which have been hard hit - have been busy over the May Bank holiday and think it likely that people will attend in large numbers posing issues within shop premises of social distancing/mask wearing
- A travel website trawl shows that Solstice at Stonehenge and Avebury is being promoted, often with out of date information, and hardly any mention of Covid

4. Lessons learned from past Solstice events

- The following is a compilation from ASSF and other sources of 'what works' and what is needed to manage Solstice at Avebury
 - Closure of Avebury High Street and Green Street
 - Local Residents' Parking Permit system
 - Bollards (closely spaced) on local roads and including wider areas (eg Trusloe and road to Windmill Hill) in advance of the first day of festivities and in place for a day or so after
 - A significant police presence including at the Trusloe entrance to Windmill Hill
 - Barriers at Ridgeway (these need to be placed closer to the car park on Overton Hill)
 - Gates needed on Ridgeway to prevent vehicles passing beyond car park and accessing AVE 5
 - Parking enforcement should continue
 - NT use of Chapel as a base
 - Coach House open 24 hours
 - Fencing off of Nursery site
 - Water points needed at Chapel and Coach House
 - Healthcare professionals needed on site at all times

5. Covid-specific issues, conclusions and considerations for Avebury Parish Council

- Solstice 2021 always poses a range of challenges at Avebury, not least because
 - it is a public, open access space centred on a residential village
 - there is no specific managed ownership of the 4-day festivities
 - attendance is unpredictable
 - even so, police security, St John ambulance, parking and a range of other facilities have or be provided at significant cost
 - and oversight of events depends on the co-operation of a number of different parties/organisations

- 2021 is further complicated by the rules and uncertainties created by the Covid pandemic and the fact that most organisations are 'waiting to see' what happens on, and a few weeks after, Government Covid announcements on 17th May

- Current Covid restrictions mean that people should not be gathering in large numbers until planned relaxation of that rule at 00.01 hours on 21st June. However, many people - and particularly young people - are eager to return to something approaching 'normality' and may well ignore Government guidelines. This could mean that many people attend even on the 18/19/20 June before restrictions are lifted, especially if the weather is fine

- Moreover, in spite of lockdown, there have been a number of unscheduled gatherings/protests in relation to climate change, 'Me Too', Black Lives Matter. Although faith and other groups are not promoting Solstice attendance at Avebury, a review of travel websites shows that Solstice at Stonehenge and Avebury is being promoted, often with out of date information, and hardly any mention of Covid

- So the challenge for all involved parties, including Avebury PC, at Avebury this year is
 - to estimate likely attendance at Avebury over the 4-day Solstice period
 - to anticipate any particular problems that could arise re Covid safety
 - to anticipate the possibility of protest gatherings unrelated to Solstice

- In formulating local Action Plans, it will be important to remain strictly within the Government's legal Covid guidelines, even though the picture is constantly changing. This indicates that at present, Avebury PC - and general policy - should probably be to discourage public attendance at Avebury over Solstice, or at least until 21 June, and to promote the live streaming that will take place from Stonehenge

- However, while discouraging unpermitted attendance, the Parish Council and other parties need to assess whether large numbers will attend and to plan accordingly based on the experience of previous years and in consultation with other involved parties.