

Winterbourne Stoke Crossroads Early Bronze Age funerary complex: heritage and research significance and the impact of the A303 scheme proposals

Paul Garwood

Senior lecturer in Archaeology
University of Birmingham, UK

1. Executive summary

1.1. This submission concerns impacts of the proposed A303 on the western part of the WHS, and especially the Winterbourne Stoke Crossroads barrow group (see Section 2).

1.2. The proposal to keep the western tunnel portal and a greatly widened road for a kilometre within the WHS is out of keeping with both the UNESCO statement of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) for the WHS (see Section 3) and current management and research strategies (see Section 4).

1.3. The close proximity of the Scheme road to the Winterbourne Stoke round barrow group (near Longbarrow roundabout) betrays a lack of understanding of the significance of such elite funerary complexes in the Stonehenge landscape and more widely (see Section 4).

1.4. The full spatial layout of the group is remarkably intact, providing striking views of one of the main funerary complexes near Stonehenge, and unique opportunities for more fully understanding the experiential and sensory properties of an Early Bronze Age linear barrow group and its landscape setting³⁶⁰ (see Section 5).

1.5. The A303 scheme in its current form would have a major detrimental impact on the setting and sensory qualities of the barrow group, diminishing one of the most spectacular heritage assets within the WHS. Such development, without major redesign, would be an act of heritage despoliation, both materially and visually, that archaeological mitigation and landscaping cannot compensate for.

1.6. It is recommended that the western tunnel portal is moved at least 1.5 kms to the west (to a point outside the WHS). This will ensure that the integrity of the WHS landscape remains intact, that no destructive landscaping or carriageway construction takes place within the WHS, and that the setting of the Winterbourne Stoke Crossroads barrow group is not only preserved but enhanced to more fully reflect its unique character, importance for the OUV of the WHS, research significance, and future potential public benefits.

2. Winterbourne Stoke Crossroads Early Bronze Age barrow group: WHS and research context

Winterbourne Stoke Crossroads barrow group, located on the western edge of the WHS just northwest of the A303/A360 junction, is the best-preserved Early Bronze Age barrow cemetery (c.2000-1600 BC) not only in Britain but in Europe as a whole (Fig.1). It is especially significant in heritage and research terms for the following reasons:

(i). The site is remarkable for the extraordinary preservation of the *full and unique* range of distinctive funerary mound types known from the British Early Bronze Age: 'bowl', 'bell', 'disc', 'saucer' and 'pond' barrows. This is the *only* monument complex where this occurs.

(ii). It is representative of the 'linear barrow cemetery' type of Early Bronze Age funerary complex, comprising close-set linear arrays of monuments. This is a distinctive feature of the spatial

organisation of funerary monuments in southern Britain during this period, no exact parallels for which exist elsewhere in Europe.

(iii). Although not excavated in modern times, recorded antiquarian investigations and finds from grave contexts allow for a reconstruction of the chronological sequence of burial and mound-building events and thus the spatial development of the funerary complex (in the case of the linear mound array, from northeast to southwest, towards - and on the same alignment as - the much earlier Neolithic long barrow close to the A303).

(iv). The physical survival of the mound architecture and overall layout of the 'cemetery', and the relatively little-changed character of the surrounding terrain since the Bronze Age (despite the close vicinity of modern roads), provides an exceptional setting for appreciating the sensory and experiential qualities of an Early Bronze Age funerary complex and its landscape setting.

(v). The Winterbourne Stoke Crossroads barrow group forms a key component of the Stonehenge Early Bronze Age sacred landscape, defined by the structured spatial and visual interrelationships among elite funerary complexes, and between these and Stonehenge at the centre.

3. The Winterbourne Stoke barrow group and the Outstanding Universal Value of the WHS

The Winterbourne Stoke Crossroads barrow group makes a significant contribution to the OUV of the Stonehenge landscape, notably with respect to UNESCO's Statement of Outstanding Universal Value for the WHS and its specification of Criterion 3 for inscription on The World Heritage List:

The complexes of monuments at Stonehenge and Avebury provide an exceptional insight into the funerary and ceremonial practices in Britain in the Neolithic and Bronze Age. Together with their settings and associated sites, they form landscapes without parallel (World Heritage Committee 2013; Simmonds & Thomas 2015, 27).

This criterion has been elaborated since by definition the *Attributes of Outstanding Universal Value* of the WHS (originally for the Stonehenge Management Plan 2009; Simmonds & Thomas 2015, 32), especially Attributes 2-6:

Attribute 2: The physical remains of the Neolithic and Bronze Age funerary and ceremonial monuments and associated sites.

Attribute 3: The siting of Neolithic and Bronze Age funerary and ceremonial sites and monuments in relation to the landscape.

Attribute 4: The design of Neolithic and Bronze Age funerary and ceremonial sites and monuments in relation to the skies and astronomy.

Attribute 5: The siting of Neolithic and Bronze Age funerary and ceremonial sites and monuments in relation to each other.

Attribute 6: The disposition, physical remains and settings of the key Neolithic and Bronze Age funerary, ceremonial and other monuments and sites of the period, which together form a landscape without parallel.

[See Simmonds & Thomas 2015, sections 2.3.15-19, for detailed accounts of the archaeological and cultural heritage significance of these attributes].

Most important for the purposes of assessing the impact of the A303 scheme on the Winterbourne Stoke Crossroads barrow group, and its wider Early Bronze Age landscape setting, is recognition of the integrity, coherence, and intrinsic interrelatedness of all the components that comprise the

prehistoric landscapes around Stonehenge. This is recognised not only materially, in terms of monuments and sub-surface features, but also with respect to their wider landscape settings, visual and other sensory properties, and the referencing of phenomena far beyond the bounds of the WHS (most notably in relation to astronomical orientations, but also significant vistas, distant topographic features and ‘skyscapes’). In this context, damage to one part of the WHS, especially where there is demonstrable connectivity between related elements, as in the case of the Early Bronze Age sacred and funerary landscape, damages the totality.

4. The spatial organisation of the Stonehenge Early Bronze Age funerary landscape

The current Research Framework for the World Heritage Site identifies six primary research themes, three of which are especially relevant to the investigation and interpretation of the Winterbourne Stoke barrow group and its setting in the Early Bronze Age landscape: Connected Landscapes; Burials and Barrows; Landscape History and Memory (Leivers & Powell 2016, 12). One of the highlighted Period-based Questions also draws attention to the need for a better understanding of the spatial inter-relationships of Early Bronze Age burial monuments (*ibid*, 18, Question J3; cf. Darvill 2012, 24).

As these research agendas recognise, central to understanding round barrow groups are their spatial settings and visual connections, and how these conveyed key social and cosmological relationships. From the 19th century BC the Stonehenge landscape underwent a profound transformation as large numbers of funerary monuments were built within sight of Stonehenge and in its wider environs. Many of these are clustered in large complexes with linear arrangements (notably the Winterbourne Stoke, Cursus, New King Barrow, Normanton Down, Lake and Wilsford barrow groups). These articulated social and political relationships as ‘chiefly’ figures, royal lineages and/or aristocratic families sought places among the constellations of the elite dead, probably in terms of genealogical narratives of ‘descent’ played out along lines of mounds (cf. Garwood 1991, 2007; Needham 2010).

The spatial arrangements of these monuments, both in relation to one another and with respect to Stonehenge, are patterned and inter-referenced to form a highly structured sacred landscape that integrated cosmological and social order. The relationships forged through architectural, ritual and visual media were not restricted to inter-referencing Stonehenge and burial monuments, but also encompassed relationships among funerary complexes. The most prominent linear barrow groups, for example, are positioned on the northern, eastern, southern and western sides of the Stonehenge visual ‘envelope’, each inter-visible with at least one of the other groups.

In this context, two aspects of Early Bronze Age funerary architecture and ritual are especially important for assessing the impact of the A303 scheme on the Winterbourne Stoke barrow group:

- (i). Barrow builders were acutely conscious of spatial sequencing and visual referencing as media for conveying a sense of order, genealogical relationships and temporality (e.g. in terms of linearity, adjacency, directionality and orientation), in ways that referred to earlier elite graves, more ancient monuments, and potentially distant topographic features and celestial phenomena.
- (ii). The positioning of monuments in ‘cemeteries’ and in prominent settings allowed for these themes to be appreciated by contemporary communities in two ways: in the course of ceremonies within funerary complexes (e.g. in procession, along lines of mounds), and more abstractly from a distance (e.g. in ‘reading’ lines of mounds seen on ridgelines).

It is evident that interference with the spatial and visual settings and experiential properties of Early Bronze Age barrow groups risks seriously compromising their significant part in the OUV of the WHS.

5. Visual significance, properties and impacts of the Winterbourne Stoke Crossroads barrow group

The Winterbourne Stoke Crossroads barrow group is by far the best preserved Early Bronze Age funerary complex not only in the Stonehenge landscape but in northwest Europe, located in a landscape setting that allows for ready appreciation of its architectural, spatial and sensory character (despite current access constraints). Yet it is clear that the spatial and visual settings of the Winterbourne Stoke Crossroads barrow group would be seriously affected by the impact of the road scheme proposals (cf. A303 Examination guidelines; Annex B9, bullet points 1-4).

Although the A303 scheme provides an opportunity to make the barrow group more accessible and improve its immediate setting by distancing the road network by c.100-300 m from the current road corridors (A303 to the south, and A360 to the west), other aspects of the scheme will intrude on the monument complex in highly damaging ways (see Figs. 2, 3). Potential public benefits that the scheme could provide during operation are thus outweighed and indeed compromised:

- (i). Appreciation of the visual orientation of the linear barrow array, and its directional development from northeast to southwest (see Figs. 4, 5), would be seriously affected by the line of the huge new A303 cutting and four-lane carriageway just 100m beyond the Early Neolithic long barrow at the southwest end of the funerary complex.
- (ii). The presence of a huge road junction, which starts to expand the A303 road line just c.250 m to the southwest of the long barrow, comprising multiple intersections, slip roads, two roundabouts, and a flyover, would have an overbearing visual presence in the landscape. This would adversely affecting vistas to the west and southwest of the Winterbourne Stoke Crossroads barrows in ways that cannot be mitigated, and are unrecoverable.
- (iii). The replacement A360 to the west of the barrow group, although moved c.100-300 m westwards from the nearest monuments, would become a dual carriageway with a greatly increased traffic presence and spatial imprint, giving rise to highly intrusive visual and auditory impact that will inevitably affect visitor appreciation of the monument group and its setting.
- (iv). The widening and deep cutting of the A303 would permanently change the terrain of the WHS Stonehenge landscape and create a fissure between the Winterbourne Stoke Crossroads barrows and the wider funerary landscape. This would separate the long barrow from rest of the Early Neolithic barrow cluster to the south, and physically and visually divide the Early Bronze Age funerary complex from the barrow groups and wider sacred landscape to the southeast.

6. Recommendations

In the light of the profoundly damaging impacts that the proposed scheme would have on the Winterbourne Stoke Crossroads barrow group and thus directly on the OUV of the WHS (in terms of visual and spatial setting, the relationship of the funerary complex with the other Early Bronze Age and earlier monuments within and outside the WHS, public access and appreciation, and research potential), the author recommends the following:

1. Should the Scheme be approved in any form, this should include moving the western tunnel portal at least 1.5 kms further west. This would ensure that the WHS landscape is kept intact and create a buffer zone outside the WHS to protect the visual setting and spatial integrity of the Early Bronze Age landscape, of which the Winterbourne Stoke Crossroads barrow group is such a significant part.
2. The setting and public presentation of the Winterbourne Stoke Crossroads barrow group should be enhanced to more fully reflect its unique character, research significance and importance for the OUV of the WHS.

References

- Darvill, T. 2012. *Research Framework for the Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites World Heritage Site: research activity in the Stonehenge Landscape 2005–2012*.
- Garwood, P. 1991. Ritual tradition and the reconstitution of society. In Garwood, P., Jennings, D., Skeates, R., and Toms, J. (eds.), *Sacred and Profane, Archaeology, ritual and religion*, 10-32. Oxford: Oxford University Committee for Archaeology Monograph 32.
- Garwood, P. 2007. Before the hills in order stood: chronology, time and history in the interpretation of early Bronze Age round barrows. In Last, J. (ed.), *Beyond the Grave: new perspectives on round barrows*, 30-52. Oxford: Oxbow Books.
- Leivers, M. and Powell, A.B. 2016. *A Research Framework for the Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites World Heritage Site. Research agenda and strategy*. Salisbury: Wessex Archaeology Monograph 39.
- Needham, S., Lawson, A.J., and Woodward, A. 2010. 'A Noble Group of Barrows': Bush Barrow and the Normanton Down early Bronze Age cemetery two centuries on', *Antiquaries Journal* 90, 1–39.
- Simmonds, S. and Thomas, B. 2015. *Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites World Heritage Site Management Plan 2015*. Stonehenge and Avebury WHS Steering Committees.
- World Heritage Committee 2013. *Annex of Document WHC-13/37.COM/8E*. 37th session of the World Heritage Committee June 2013, Committee Decisions 37 COM 8E: Adoption of retrospective Statements of Outstanding Universal Value (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/373>).

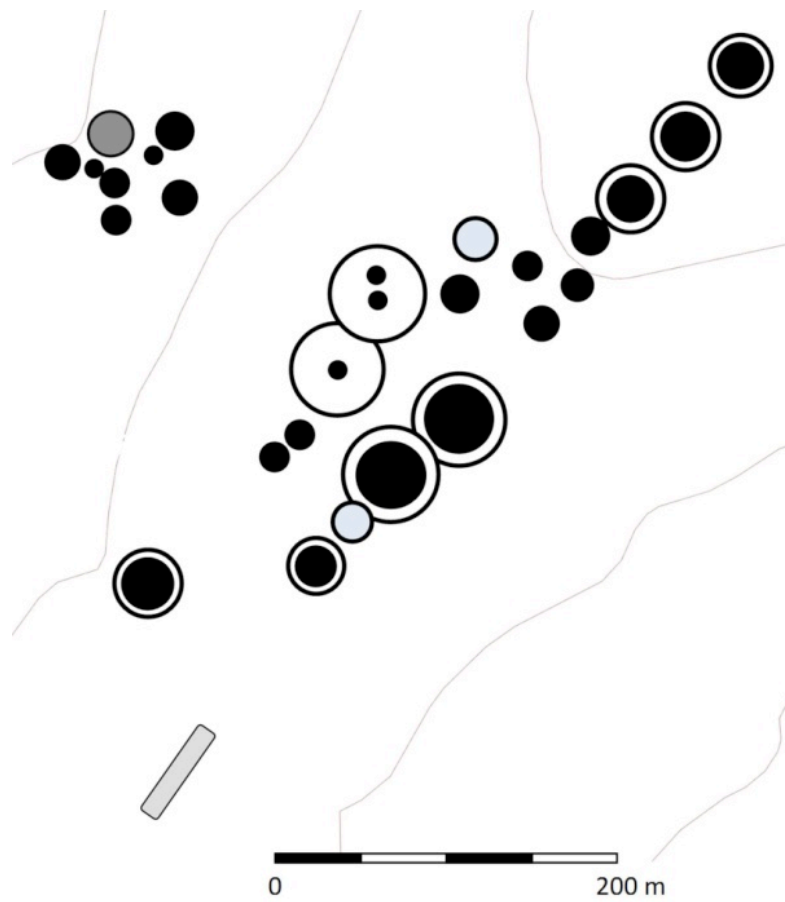


Figure 1: Plan of the Winterbourne Stoke Crossroads round barrow group

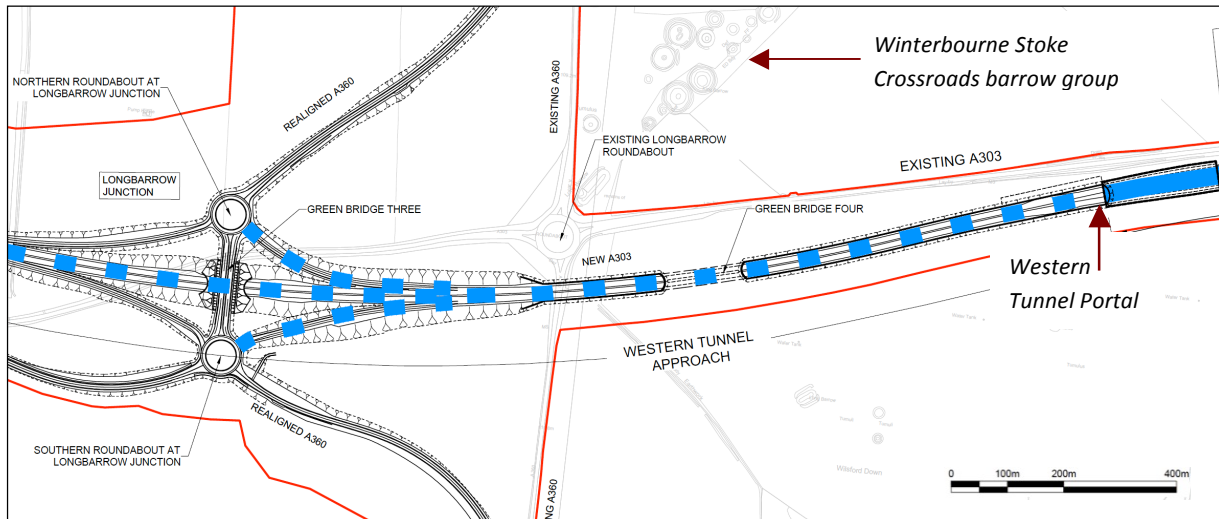


Figure 2: The proposed road scheme development in the western part of the WHS and the environs of the Winterbourne Stoke Crossroads round barrow group (A303 Amesbury to Berwick Down TR010025, Plan 2.15, annotated).



Figure 3: Winterbourne Stoke Crossroads (A303/A360 junction); archaeological evaluation trenches (in the course of excavation, 2018) in the areas of the proposed A303 scheme road and junction construction to the west of the WHS boundary (image from Google Earth).



Figure 4: The landscape setting of the Winterbourne Stoke Crossroads round barrow group, showing the proposed new A303/A360 junction and road corridors (in grey), and the visual orientation of the linear barrow array (blue arrow) and general westerly/south-westerly vista defined by the terrain (white arrow).



Figure 5: View from Winterbourne Stoke G5 on the alignment of the linear barrow array, oriented southwest towards Winterbourne Stoke barrow G4 (a bell barrow) and the Early Neolithic long barrow in the middle distance. The current line of the A303 can be seen immediately beyond this.