

National Trust acquires land of exceptional archaeological importance around Stonehenge

21 March 2022

Investment from the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) will help protect the landscape's significant archaeology, re-introduce chalk grasslands and open up access to the public.

The National Trust will acquire over 170 hectares of the Stonehenge World Heritage Site thanks to a £800,000 grant from the NHMF. The land contains 61 archaeological sites of global significance.

Many of these sites have been progressively damaged over the years by arable farming practices, including ploughing. It was feared they could be entirely lost within 10 years if no action was taken.

The land will now be returned to pasture, and its monuments and artefacts – including six currently on the Heritage at Risk register – will be protected by the National Trust for future generations.

Archaeology of global importance

The area's significant archaeology includes 15 Scheduled Monuments and 31 unscheduled monuments. Highlights include:

- **Part of Stonehenge Avenue** – a Bronze Age processional route from the River Avon, carefully designed to ensure the final approach to Stonehenge respected the winter solstice sunset and summer solstice sunrise alignment.
- **The Coneybury Anomaly** – a Neolithic feasting pit thought to be a meeting place for the first farmers and local hunter gatherers a thousand years before Stonehenge was built.
- **A rare Middle Neolithic occupation site**, from the period when the very first parts of the Stonehenge monument were constructed. The site includes a group of pits that contained one of the largest collections of Middle Neolithic pottery ever discovered in southern Britain. Historic England's surveys suggests many more such pits are present.

A haven for nature and wildlife

The National Trust has a long-term ambition of returning 2,000 acres of the Stonehenge Landscape to chalk grassland – a unique and endangered landscape that is home to a diverse array of wildlife. More than 80% of the UK’s chalk grassland has been lost since the Second World War, and around half of what remains is in Wiltshire.

Thanks to the National Trust, the landscape surrounding Stonehenge is now home to brown hares, skylarks and Adonis blue butterflies, alongside wildflowers such as sainfoin, cowslip and prickly poppy. They plan to transform the newly acquired 170 hectares of land in the same way.

Opened up to the public

After many years in private ownership, the National Trust plans to designate more of the land as permissive open access. Visitors will eventually be able to enjoy a revitalised historical landscape more familiar to the builders of Stonehenge and once again walk the ceremonial route along the Avenue.

Dr Simon Thurley, CBE, Chair of the National Heritage Memorial Fund, said: “We at the National Heritage Memorial Fund are proud to help the National Trust secure the future of more of the Stonehenge Landscape, one of the world’s most famous and important archaeological sites.

“Thanks to our support, prehistoric monuments at risk will be safeguarded, ecological habitats will be protected and improved, and in time, greater access will be possible.”

NHMF funding available

For over 40 years, NHMF has provided financial assistance towards the acquisition, preservation and maintenance of some of the UK’s finest heritage at risk of loss.

Alongside our [standard funding stream](#), our [£40m COVID-19 Response Fund](#) is currently available and providing a lifeline for nationally important heritage assets affected by the pandemic.

Stay updated about the NHMF

To hear the latest news about NHMF funding:

- Follow us on [LinkedIn](#) and [Instagram](#)
- [Sign up to our mailing list](#)