

NEWS

Stonehenge visitor centre scrapped

No go for Denton Corker Marshall scheme as road tunnel abandoned

Marguerite Lazell

The long-awaited visitor centre at Stonehenge by Denton Corker Marshall has been scrapped after the government abandoned plans for a road tunnel below the site.

Transport minister Tom Harris confirmed last week that the £500 million tunnel would not be funded, leaving Denton Corker Marshall's £65 million plans — designed with the tunnel in mind — “dead in the water”, according to the local council.

Instead, the government now plans a semi-permanent visitor centre at the prehistoric site, to be built in time for the 2012 Olympics.

The government's move is a huge blow to English Heritage, which has submitted three different designs for a visitor centre in 15 years, including a scheme by Edward Cullinan which was dropped in 2000.

It could also lead to action by

Unesco, which said it will now “examine the implications of the decision for the value and integrity of Stonehenge as a world heritage property.”

“We've had to wait 21 years for a visitors centre,” local Conservative MP Robert Key said. “It is a huge disappointment that the government has decided to do nothing with the roads. It underlines the complete incompetence of successive governments.” He added that it was now essential a new temporary centre was open by 2012.

A spokesman for EH, which manages the site, said the quango was “very disappointed”.

“The project [was] the best and most practical means by which the agreed vision for the Stonehenge world heritage site could have been achieved,” he said.

Architecture minister Margaret Hodge is now understood to be drawing up plans for a semi-permanent building to stand for 15-20 years, having told the Commons on Monday that the government was still committed to improving the “setting” for Stonehenge by the time of the Olympics.

Denton Corker Marshall was unavailable for comment, but planning officer at Salisbury council David Milton confirmed the practice's proposal was no longer possible. “We're back to square one, it's a shame, they're fantastic architects,” he said.

He suggested the new centre could be relocated to the Fargo Plantation, closer to the stones than the Denton Corker Marshall version but screened by trees.

Stakeholders including EH, the Highways Agency, Natural England, and Wiltshire council are now discussing ways forward with details of the new proposals expected by the end of January.

FULL CIRCLE

Circa 2150 BC

Stone circle built

2000

EH acquires site

2001

Denton Corker

Marshall wins competition to design visitor centre

2004

EH submits Denton

Corker Marshall's designs for planning

2005

Planning refused

Feb 2006

Council invites EH to resubmit plans

March 2007

planning granted, subject to tunnel being built

Dec 2007

road scheme and visitor centre abandoned



FIRST LOOK



A strongly horizontal design for the building resembles a blade or an oar, says the architect Shahriar Nasser.

Oxford boathouse gives river a strong design at a stroke

Belsize Architects has completed this new £2 million boathouse for an Oxford college.

Architect Shahriar Nasser said he had adopted a high-risk strategy to convince University College that a modern building could work on the riverbank site, after its grade II-listed Victorian boathouse burned down in 1999.

“I think the idea was that if you were going to do a modern building, it was at your own risk,” he said, adding that he was inspired by the area's horizons to introduce a strong horizontal element into his design, which he describes as being “a lot like a blade or an oar”.

The design is made up of two sections with a double-height central foyer.

The brick-clad ground floor, which includes a boat repair area, storage space and club room, was made secure to deter trespassers, but the timber-clad first floor is more open, with large balconies, a caretaker's flat, six student bedrooms, a kitchen and living room.

Horizontal slat shutters allow light through but while the balcony is in use on race days they can be closed to create more privacy for the caretaker's flat.

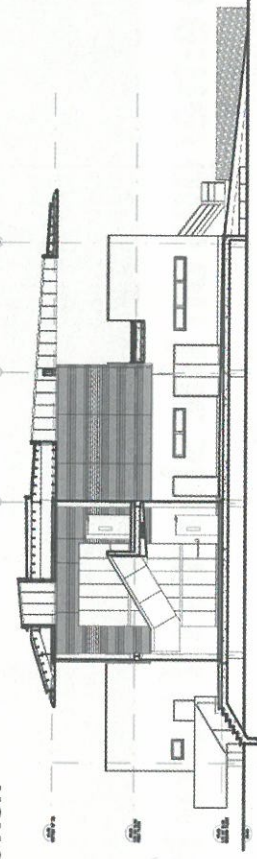
The building sits on deep concrete piles, with the bottom floor raised 800mm above ground level as it sits on a flood plain.

The steel and timber roof is cantilevered to afford the best views of the races, which take place on the nearby River Thames.



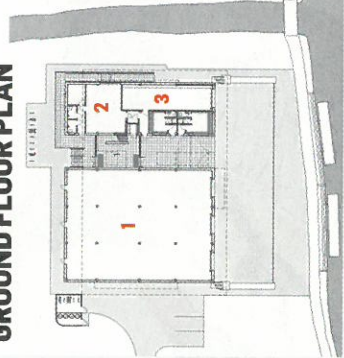
First floor accommodation is more open, including a flat, student rooms and balconies.

SECTION



GROUND FLOOR PLAN

- 1 Boat storage
- 2 Gym
- 3 Boat repair



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

- 4 Terrace
- 5 Kitchen/lounge
- 6 Club room
- 7 Key worker flat



Homeowners give new estates thumbs down

Almost a third of homeowners living in new housing estates have slammed their environments as characterless.

The shocking statistic is from a newly published Cabe study, which reveals widespread dissatisfaction among the inhabitants of new housing developments about the quality and security of their environment.

In addition to the 30% of respondents who thought their area had “no distinct character”, 40% bemoaned a lack of public space, and nearly half (48%) said there was not enough play space.

Dissatisfaction levels also increased the longer people had lived in the developments, with 18% of residents who had been living in an area for more than a year saying they were dissatisfied, com-

pared with 10% who had lived there for less than a year.

The watchdog employed pollster Ipsos Mori to survey 643 residents living in 33 new developments last autumn.

Matt Bell, director of campaigns and education at Cabe, said: “What we see here is really clear evidence that the customer is not happy. When you look at what drives customer satisfaction, a lot of it can only be delivered by good design, safety, security and character.”

He called on planners to ask more questions about quality of place, using Cabe's Building for Life model. He added that house-builders must begin to recognise that rate of sale would be affected by quality of place, not just the quality of the kitchen and the bathroom.