

STONEHENGE VISITOR CENTRE

Outline Description

If we are to understand the required form and function of the proposed Visitor Centre, we should begin by understanding the form and function of Stonehenge itself.



The form and function of Stonehenge are described in:

REVERSE ENGINEERING STONEHENGE

A REMARKABLE SCIENTIFIC INSTRUMENT

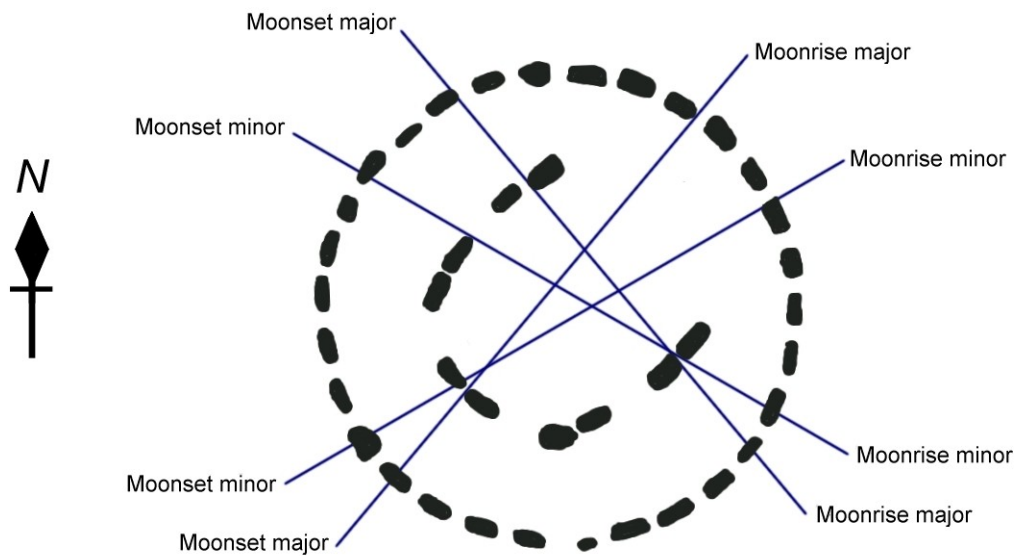
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We can now see that Stonehenge, at phase three, was primarily used as an observatory. It is designed to accurately measure the angular bearing of the sun, moon, planets, and stars, as they rise and set.

The key measurement angles for the moon are shown here.



Visitor Centre Requirements

The visitor centre should:

Be inspirational in itself



Be bold and innovative



Not hide away underground, but reflect the ambition of our ancestors



Not detract from the ancient monument



Demonstrate how Stonehenge worked



Have a large exhibition space for artefacts



Have accessible archives for serious researchers



Allow plenty of space for the shop and restaurant



Have a zero carbon footprint, and supply a surplus of energy



Provide spaces for ceremonial use, and for quiet contemplation



Connect

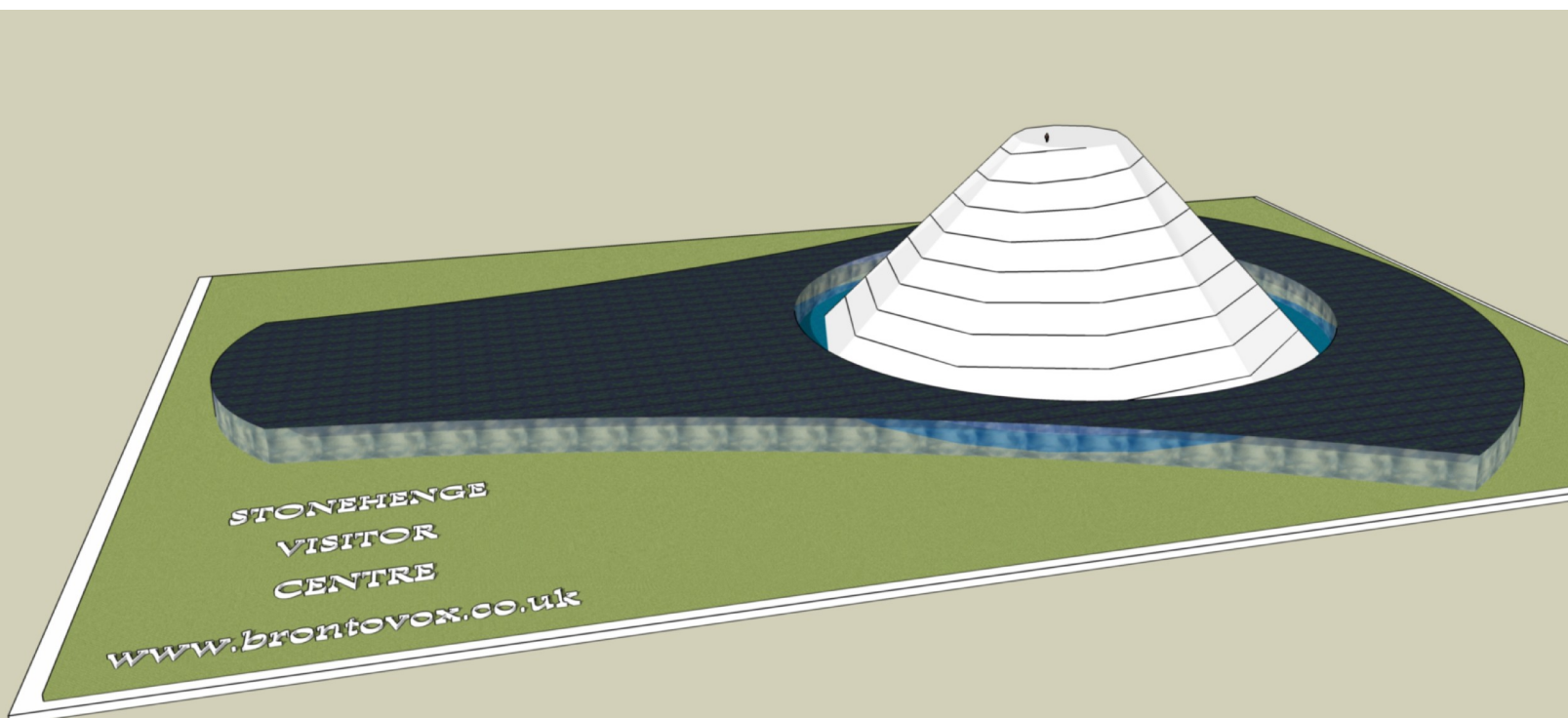
Visitor Centre Implementation

The Visitor Centre takes its design cues from Silbury Hill. It is not a slavish copy, but represents a respect for the achievements of our ancestors. It shows an appreciation of their symbolism, and an acknowledgement that the use of modern materials and technology is very much in line with their own ambitions for progress and achievements.

Within the new hill, there is a replica of Stonehenge. The inner ceiling is domed and reflective. It forms a huge screen, on which the movements of the sun, moon, planets and stars can be projected, as they would have been seen over four millennia ago. It provides an immersive experience, which will not be forgotten.

The replica may not necessarily be of the same material as the original. Now that we can understand the function of the original, we can sculpt a new form, using modern materials, maybe stainless steel, and incorporating glass. Provided that it is functionally equivalent, this approach is both sympathetic and innovative.

A spiral path leads down from the summit, as is the case with the original Silbury Hill. The spiral shape had a great significance for our ancestors. The surface is faceted, and gleaming white, just as the original would have been. The path has a gentle gradient, giving easy accessibility. The original has eroded and is hazardous. The design is rejuvenated here.



We can consider that Stonehenge and Silbury Hill form a complimentary pair. They lie more or less on a line running north to south, with Stonehenge in the south. Silbury Hill is constructed mainly of chalk, and surrounded by a moat of water.

It does seem that Silbury Hill is associated with new life. The shape has been likened to a womb, with a baby developing inside. It has been a local tradition to associate it with the spring equinox, when new life emerges. A very special sight can be seen at the time of the equinox: The sun appears to rise from the centre of the summit.

The shape of the moat is transformed into the shape of the roofed area. The flat roof is covered with solar panels, to capture the sunlight, and convert it to heat and to electricity. In detail, the roof has rows of solar panels sloping towards the south. Between each row of panels there are vertical windows which introduce daylight into the heart of the building. It will not be necessary to use artificial lighting within the building during daylight hours.

It would not be right to have cues for water, without also introducing real water into the design. There is a moat around the hill, which provides storage of water from the roof and from the hill. This stored water can reduce the usage of mains water considerably. It can also have the function of a heat store: During summer to cool the building, and during winter to provide some warmth. This can be supplemented by the incorporation of ground source heat pumps. With all of these environmentally friendly features, over the course of a year, the system should be carbon neutral at least, and may indeed provide a net gain of energy into the electricity grid.

The Visitor Centre should not be sited too close to Stonehenge, in order not to detract from it. Neither should it hide away like an embarrassed child. A balance needs to be found, so that old and new can coexist in the same landscape. It is a sacred landscape, and we should give proper honour to those who experienced it before us. We should also realise that they are our ancestors. Four thousand years may seem like a long time, but in the context of the timespan of human evolution, it is not long at all. They were much like ourselves, with the same emotions, the same hopes and fears, and the same desire to innovate and make progress. Stonehenge demonstrates this admirably. It was conceived with a tremendous passion to invent and to show boldness of purpose. It would be a dishonour to those who have gone before us if we were not to respond in like manner today.

In the words of Goethe: “Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.”