

REPORT ON CONSULTATION ON THE REQUEST FOR REBURIAL OF PREHISTORIC HUMAN REMAINS FROM THE ALEXANDER KEILLER MUSEUM AT AVEBURY

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I: Introduction

In 2006, English Heritage (EH) and the National Trust (NT) received a request from Paul Davies, Reburial Officer of the Council of British Druid Orders, for the reburial of prehistoric human remains from archaeological excavations in the Avebury area, which are currently in the Alexander Keiller Museum at Avebury.

As this request raises wider and sensitive issues, and the way in which it is resolved will set precedents, as Avebury is a World Heritage Site, and as the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) has recently issued Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums which included recommendations for responding to requests for return of human remains (DCMS 2005), EH and the NT decided to follow this guidance in responding to this request, assembled the relevant information, and produced a draft report setting out the available relevant information as recommended by the DCMS Guidance (Thackray and Payne 2008).

As there are potentially many groups and individuals who have an interest in and views on this request, we felt that it was important that this draft report and assembled information should be made available for comment by other interested parties before EH and the NT make any decisions. The draft report was therefore placed on the English Heritage and National Trust websites at the beginning of November 2008 with an invitation to comment, and letters of invitation to comment were sent to a number of groups and individuals who were also encouraged to pass on information about the consultation to other interested parties. Copies of the letter of invitation and of the list of those to whom it was sent are attached as Appendices 1 and 2. A pro-forma asking for replies to a number of questions was made available on the website, and is attached as Appendix 3. Respondents were encouraged to use this pro-forma as it was felt that this would make it easier to handle and analyse replies; but in order to make it possible for those without web access to comment, it was made clear that we were willing to receive replies in any other form, and to send out paper copies of the draft report and the pro-forma on request. We also made it clear that the same weight would be given to uninvited comments as to invited ones.

The value of a consultation of this kind is that it allows groups and individuals who feel strongly about the issue to come forward, say what they think, and to produce any relevant evidence that they feel may have been overlooked and which may contribute to better-informed decision-making. But as respondents are self-selected, it does not give a reliable guide to what the public in general think; we have in parallel taken other steps to assess public opinion..

The consultation period closed on 15 February 2009. During the course of this period we received 567 individual responses and 73 responses from groups and institutions. The purpose of this report is to summarise, analyse and comment on these responses.

2: Analysis of respondents

Table 1 shows that most of the individual respondents were UK-based; it gives a breakdown by UK region where information is available (usually from postcode). Avebury is in the South-West Region but close to South-East and West Midlands; as would be expected, response was particularly strong from the South-West and South-East regions. The table also shows that there were clusters of responses from some cities and towns; a cluster of 38 replies from Sheffield is noteworthy, and this and several smaller clusters appeared to include groups of replies from particular universities; but no single cluster made up more than a small proportion of the total response.

Region	Number	%	
South West	111	20	Bristol 21, Swindon 18, Bath 14, Plymouth 11
South East	99	18	Oxford 14, Southampton 13
London	43	8	
West Midlands	35	6	
East Midlands	11	2	
East of England	33	6	Cambridge 14
Yorkshire and Humberside	63	11	Sheffield 38, York 10
North West	30	5	
North East	43	8	Durham 27, Newcastle 11
Wales	8	1	
Scotland	32	6	Edinburgh 15
Ulster	7	1	
Channel Isles	1		
Foreign	24	4	
Not stated	27	5	
Total	567		

A list of the 73 organisations and other groups that replied is given in Appendix 4. They are all UK-based, though several have wider scope; they include Druid and pagan groups, academic institutions and societies, museums, amateur archaeological societies, and Avebury Parish Council.

3: Analysis of responses

The first part of the consultation (Questions 1-4) asked a number of questions in relation to the draft report, invited comment and further evidence, and then asked people whether they thought the Avebury remains should be reburied or kept in the Museum:

- Q1 asked whether respondents agreed or disagreed with the view taken by EH and the NT that the genetic relationship between members of CoBDO and the Avebury human remains is not a “direct and close relationship” in the sense meant in the DCMS Guidance.
- Q2 asked whether respondents agreed or disagreed that EH and the NT recognise and respect the importance of the Avebury landscape and these human remains to CoBDO and other Druid and Pagan groups, and at the same time recognise and respect the cultural and spiritual significance to many others as well.

- Q3 asked whether respondents agreed or disagreed that the human remains have contributed and will continue to contribute in an important way to our understanding of our past.
- Q4 asked whether respondents thought that the Avebury human remains should be reburied, reburied with continuing public and research access, or retained in the museum with access where reasonable for CoBDO and other groups.

The second part (Questions 5-7) asked respondents to comment on whether the DCMS process was appropriate, and whether the request had been handled appropriately:

- Q5 asked whether respondents thought that the DCMS process was appropriate for use in this case.
- Q6 asked whether respondents thought that the limited moratorium on destructive sampling was appropriate in the circumstances.
- Q7 asked whether respondents thought that the form of consultation was appropriate.

Most of the respondents used the pro-forma (534 individuals out of 567; 53 groups out of 73).

3.1: Responses relating to process (Questions 5-7)

We start with these as the appropriateness of the DCMS process is a key starting issue.

3.1.1: Question 5: Appropriateness of DCMS process

At an early stage, EH and the NT agreed with CoBDO that we would in principle follow the process set out in the DCMS Guidance (2005). Though this was designed primarily to provide museums with a process for considering requests for the repatriation of human remains in UK museums which had come from parts of the world such as Australia during the colonial period, the working group that drew up this Guidance were very aware that it might be used for other claims and requests, and felt that it should be appropriate for wider use, suggesting that it could be used as “an overarching set of guidelines for claims regardless of their origin”.

EH and the NT felt, and CoBDO agreed, that in the absence of any other more appropriate process, the basic approach of the DCMS process was reasonably appropriate in providing a structured way to consider the locus of the party making a request and of other interested parties, and to consider different kinds of harm and benefit, in order to assess and try to balance these in relation to each other in an open and evidence-based way so that the reasons for any decision were clear to all interested parties.

Question 5 in the consultation asked whether respondents thought that the DCMS process was appropriate for use in this case. Replies to Question 5 are tabulated below:

Question 5: Is the DCMS process appropriate for consideration of this request?							
Q5	Very appropriate	Appropriate	Inappropriate	Very inappropriate	Don't know/ Uncertain	no reply	Total
Individuals	131	186	33	25	127	65	567
%	23	33	6	4	22	11	100
Groups	17	20	3+(2)	3	11+(2)	15	73
%	23	27	7	4	18	21	100

(Numbers are given in parentheses where the response was similar but not expressed precisely as in the pro-forma. Individual cell percentages sometimes add up to 99 or 101 because of rounding.)

About five times as many respondents thought the DCMS process was appropriate or very appropriate (56% of individuals and 50% of groups), than thought it was inappropriate or very inappropriate (10% of individuals and 11% of groups); however quite large numbers were uncertain or did not reply (33% of individuals and 39% of groups).

Cross tabulation of the replies to Question 5 and to Question 4 (on the future of the remains) shows that more of those who are in favour of reburial were uncertain about the appropriateness of the DCMS process than are those who were in favour of retention.

Respondents were invited to comment further; and, specifically, those who thought the DCMS process inappropriate were invited to say why and to suggest what other process might have been more appropriate.

The most frequent comment, both from those who thought the process was appropriate and from those who thought it was inappropriate, was that there should be some way of dealing more quickly with claims with little basis.

Another frequent comment was that the DCMS process was primarily intended for more recent cases involving remains from other countries with clearer links with modern communities, not for older cases from the UK. Some respondents thought that for this reason it was inappropriate; others that it was appropriate because it was the best available process; one respondent commented that the process is valuable because it treats all requests and claimants in the same way.

Some of those who thought that the process was inappropriate criticised the weight it gives to different considerations, saying that ethics are not considered, that more weight should be given to respect to the dead, or to the views of the public, or to archaeological research, or that too much weight is given to religious views or to genetic relationship. There was also some criticism that the guidance is not clear enough in particular respects – e.g. the definition of community and the legitimacy of cultural and religious claims.

The only response to the invitation to suggest what other process would have been more appropriate came from a small number of respondents who thought that the decision should be left to skeletal experts and archaeologists. Several thought that

the DCMS process should be reviewed or revised, and that specific guidance for pre-Christian human remains would be helpful.

One respondent suggested that centralised decision-making is needed to avoid inconsistency in decisions by different museums.

***EH and NT response to these comments:** We believe that the basic approach of the DCMS process can reasonably be applied to requests such as the Avebury reburial request, and that it is valuable to use a process capable of general application. We agree that some of the criteria are not easy to understand and apply in an objective and consistent way; however we think this mainly reflects the difficulty of the issues and balances that are needed rather than reflecting any basic defect in the process, and that there is no inbuilt bias. We agree that it would be reasonable for organisations to deal rapidly with requests with little basis; however we feel that it is important to give requests reasonable consideration, especially when those making requests feel disadvantaged for any reason, and that it is important to give clear reasons for decisions.*

3.1.2: Question 6: Appropriateness of the moratorium on destructive sampling while the request was under consideration

At an early stage in the process, CoBDO objected to destructive sampling of the human remains while their request was under consideration. EH and the NT decided that it would be unreasonable to call a halt to sampling that had already been agreed to, but agreed to put any new applications on hold while the request was considered as long as the process was completed within a reasonable time.

Question 6 asked whether this limited moratorium was appropriate. Replies are tabulated below:

Question 6: Was the limited moratorium on destructive sampling appropriate in the circumstances?							
Q6	Very appropriate	Appropriate	Inappropriate	Very inappropriate	Don't know/ Uncertain	no reply	Total
Individuals	59	192+(1)	78	49	122	66	567
%	10	34	14	9	22	12	100
Groups	4	30	9	6	2+(1)	21	73
%	5	41	12	8	4	29	100

(Numbers are given in parentheses where the response was similar but not expressed precisely as in the pro-forma. Individual cell percentages sometimes add up to 99 or 101 because of rounding.)

Opinion was clearly rather mixed: on balance more (44% of individuals and 46% of groups) felt the moratorium was appropriate than felt that it was inappropriate (23% of individuals and 20% of groups), but 34% of individuals and 33% of groups were uncertain or did not reply.

Cross tabulation of the replies to Questions 4 and 6 shows that slightly more of those who were in favour of reburial thought the limited moratorium appropriate than those who are in favour of retention, but the difference is small.

Respondents were invited to comment further; and, specifically to suggest whether different action should have been taken.

Relatively few of those who thought the limited moratorium appropriate commented. Their most frequent comment was that it was appropriate but should not set a precedent for future requests, and that it should not drag on for too long. Other frequent comments were that it was fair, and that it helped to establish confidence in the process.

Many more of those who thought the limited moratorium inappropriate commented. Most of these thought that EH and the NT should not have agreed to any moratorium because it gave credibility to a claim without basis, gave too much weight to the views of a small group, set an unhelpful precedent, or that research should not have been hindered in this way.

A few respondents thought that the moratorium did not go far enough and that no testing should have taken place while the request was considered, even if this had already been agreed to.

EH and NT response to comments: *We believe that the limited moratorium was right basically because*

- *it would have been wrong to go back on agreements that had already been made, but*
- *it would otherwise have been wrong to prejudge the outcome of the request, and*
- *a moratorium was reversible while continued destructive sampling would not have been reversible.*

We note that a majority of respondents take the same view. We understand concern about delaying or obstructing research; fortunately the harm done in this case has not been large: there had been two sampling requests in the preceding five years and we are aware of none that are pending at the moment as a result of the moratorium.

We do not feel that this should be seen as setting a precedent for future cases; these should be judged on their own merits.

3.1.3: Question 7: Appropriateness of consultation

The DCMS Guidance recognises that it is important to consider whether there are other possible claimants, but makes no specific recommendation about wider consultation. Wider consultation seemed important in considering the Avebury request mainly because it was clear that there were potentially many other interested parties. In order to give them – and any other interested parties of whom we were unaware – the best chance to comment without incurring unreasonable cost, EH and the NT decided that the most appropriate way to do this was by public consultation in the way described earlier in this report.

Question 7 asked whether this form of consultation was appropriate. Replies are tabulated below:

Question 7: Is this form of consultation appropriate?							
Q7	Very appropriate / Very helpful	Appropriate / Helpful	Inappropriate	Very inappropriate	Don't know/ Uncertain	no reply	Total
Individuals	160	228	33	22	77	47	567
%	28	40	6	4	14	8	100
Groups	16	23+(2)	5	1	6	18	73
%	22	34	7	1	8	27	100

(Numbers are given in parentheses where the response was similar but not expressed precisely as in the pro-forma. Individual cell percentages sometimes add up to 99 or 101 because of rounding.)

A majority of respondents thought that it was appropriate (68% of individuals and 56% of groups), and relatively few thought that it was inappropriate (10% of individuals and 8% of groups); 22% of individuals and 35% of groups did not reply or were uncertain.

Cross tabulation of the replies to Questions 4 and 7 shows that a clear majority were in favour of consultation whether they were in favour of retention or of reburial.

Respondents were invited to comment further; and, specifically to suggest whether any other process would have been better.

Most of the comments were critical – frequent themes were that the consultation should have been more widely publicised, that it was unnecessary or a waste of money, that it was open to abuse by well-organised pressure groups, that it gave credibility to a request with little basis, and that the format was over-complicated and hard to understand.

Respondents were also concerned that the consultation should not be thought to set a precedent which would require museums considering similar requests in future to consult in the same way, and that a consultation of this kind should not be treated as a binding vote.

***EH and NT response to comments:** We thought it was important to consult widely because this was the first request of this kind to be dealt with in this way; we hope that the results will be useful for museums considering future requests and do not believe that it should be seen as setting a precedent requiring them to consult in a similar way.*

As consultations are more likely to be answered by those with particular interests, we agree that the results should not be treated as a vote, or as necessarily reflecting the views of the wider community. The importance of the consultation is more that it provides an opportunity for interested individuals and groups to say what they think and why.

We are sorry if the consultation did not reach people that it should have reached – we tried to get it to as many people as possible while keeping costs reasonable, and are grateful to all those people and organisations who passed news of the consultation on to others. We are sorry also that the pro-forma and the web form caused problems.

3.2: Responses relating to the request (Questions 1-3)

3.2.1: Connection and continuity

One of the most important criteria set out in the DCMS guidance is the connection or continuity between the claimants and the claimed remains. The guidance is clear that there are several different kinds of continuity – including genealogical or ethnic, cultural, spiritual and geographical – which may form the basis for a claim or request, while at the same time cautioning that: “Archaeological and historical study has shown that it is very difficult to demonstrate clear genealogical, cultural or ethnic continuity far into the past, though there are exceptions to this. For these reasons it is considered that claims are unlikely to be successful for any remains over 300 years old and are unlikely to be considered for remains over 500 years old except where a very close and continuous geographical, spiritual and cultural link can be demonstrated” (DCMS 2005: 27)).

3.2.1.1: Question 1: Genetic connection

“Archaeological and historical study has shown that it is very difficult to demonstrate clear genealogical, cultural or ethnic continuity far into the past, though there are exceptions to this. For these reasons it is considered that claims are unlikely to be successful for any remains over 300 years old and are unlikely to be considered for remains over 500 years old except where a very close and continuous geographic, spiritual and cultural link can be demonstrated” (DCMS 2005: 27)

In their request, CoBDO made no claim of cultural or religious continuity, but suggested that “members of the Council, like all people indigenous to Europe, have a ‘close genetic’ claim for reburial.”

In Section 3 of the draft report, EH and the NT agree that the human remains from Windmill Hill and West Kennet Avenue are almost certainly broadly genetically related to most of the present population of Western Europe, but take the view that this is not a “direct and close relationship” in the sense meant in the DCMS guidance.

Question 1 asked whether respondents agree with or disagree with this view. Replies are tabulated below:

Question 1: Do you agree or disagree with the statement: “EH and the NT currently take the view that the genetic relationship between members of CoBDO and the Avebury human remains, which is presumably shared with most of the population of Western Europe, is not a “direct and close relationship” in the sense meant in the DCMS guidance.”?							
Q1	Agree strongly	Agree	Disagree	Disagree strongly	Don't know	no reply	Total
Individuals	458	57+(3)	5	13	5	26	567
%	81	11	1	2	1	5	100
Groups	42+(2)	6+(3)	2	2	2+(1)	13	73
%	60	12	3	3	4	18	100

(Numbers are given in parentheses where the response was similar but not expressed precisely as in the pro-forma. Individual cell percentages sometimes add up to 99 or 101 because of rounding.)

Most respondents agree with the view expressed by EH and the NT (92% of individuals and 72% of groups); only a small number disagree (3% of individuals and 6% of groups). A higher proportion of groups gave no reply than of individuals.

Cross tabulation of the replies to Questions 1 and 4 shows that most of those who are in favour of retention believe that the genetic relationship is not “direct and close”, while most of those in favour of reburial believe that the genetic relationship is “direct and close”.

Respondents were also invited to add comments or information in relation to Q1 and, more generally, in relation to Section 3 of the Draft Report.

No additional evidence was put forward.

Comments from those in favour of reburial include:

- Using genealogical or genetic relationship as a criterion is inappropriate (several similar).
- Irrespective of relationship, these remains deserve respect and so deserve reburial (several similar).
- The relationship between CoBDO and the remains is strong enough to be taken into account (with no further evidence).
- The lapse of time makes it impossible to demonstrate a close family link.
- Using genetics in this way is a perversion of science.

Comments from those in favour of retention in the Museum include:

- There is no evidence that the members of CoBDO have any closer relationship with the remains than most of the rest of the population of Britain and Western Europe, and for this reason CoBDO has no special right to request that the remains are reburied (many similar).
- They should have an equal right, and want the remains to be kept in the Museum (many similar)
- Claims or requests on the basis of genealogical linkage should be limited to close family relationships, citing DCMS Guidance (quoted above) that claims relating to remains more than 300 years old are unlikely to succeed (several similar)
- A distinction should be made between close genealogical relationship of this kind and the much broader common genetic inheritance evidenced by mitochondrial DNA lineages (several similar).
- An approach based on these wider lineages verges on ethnicity or racism, and should be inadmissible (several similar).

EH and NT response to comments: *As no further evidence was put forward on this question, we remain of the view that no small group of individuals is likely to have and to be able to show the kind of close genetic link that would justify a claim or request on this basis, as the DCMS Guidance suggests. This reflects the reality that people who died several thousand years ago potentially have very large numbers of descendants; and that it is very hard to show this kind of close relationship over this kind of timespan. We note that most respondents agree.*

3.2.1.2: Question 2: Cultural and spiritual continuity and significance

The DCMS Guidance says that for a claim to be considered, “it would generally be expected that continuity of belief, customs or language could be demonstrated between the claimants and the community from which the remains originate” (DCMS 2005: 26).

CoBDO made no claim on this basis; however they stated that the remains and the Avebury landscape have important spiritual and religious significance for them. In Section 4 of the draft report, EH and the NT accept that this is the case and respect these beliefs; however they take the view that these remains are part of an archaeological heritage which has important cultural and spiritual significance for many other people as well.

Question 2 asked whether respondents agree with or disagree with this view. Replies are tabulated below:

Question 2: Do you agree or disagree with the statement: “EH and the NT recognise and respect the importance of the Avebury landscape and these human remains to CoBDO and other Druid and Pagan groups; at the same time they recognise and respect the cultural and spiritual significance to others as well.”?							
Q2	Agree strongly	Agree	Disagree	Disagree strongly	Don't know	no reply	Total
Individuals	337	138	17	21	11	43	567
%	59	24	3	4	2	8	100
Groups	39	12	-	1	(1)	20	73
%	53	16	0	1	1	27	100

(Numbers are given in parentheses where the response was similar but not expressed precisely as in the pro-forma. Individual cell percentages sometimes add up to 99 or 101 because of rounding.)

Most respondents agreed with the view expressed by EH and the NT (83% of individuals and 69% of groups); only a small number disagree (7% of individuals and 1% of groups). A higher proportion of groups gave no reply than of individuals.

Cross tabulation of the replies to Questions 2 and 4 shows no very large difference between those in favour of reburial and those in favour of retention – a clear majority in both groups agree with the statement in Question 2.

Comments from those in favour of reburial include:

- Religious rights should take precedence over other considerations, and that Druids deserve the same rights as other religions (“if it was a site of a mosque or temple you wouldn’t dare do this”) (several similar)

- EH and the NT should respond and act more positively to this acknowledgement, e.g. “remove fences and “information boards” that insist on singular views and ways of acting”, and “return the remains without delay” (several similar).
- Many non-Pagans support the Druid and Pagan viewpoint.
- Public opinion should be consulted.

Comments from those in favour of retention in the Museum include:

- These remains are part of a common heritage that is shared by and important to all of us “Avebury is a place of great archaeological significance. As such it belongs to everybody not just a few people, as do the remains” (many similar).
- Modern Druidry and Paganism are recent constructs; there are no substantial links between them and prehistoric religious belief and practice, and so no basis for giving modern Pagans and Druids special rights in relation to prehistoric remains and sites (many similar).
- We should listen to and respect minority groups, but should not let this act as a veto to legitimate scientific enquiry (several similar)
- The people of the area should be consulted.
- Research and a wish to know more about the past is one way to express respect: “In my pagan experience, the one common denominator among our varied ancestors is that they want to be remembered.” (several similar)
- These bones have significance to me; I would be hurt by their reburial (several similar).
- Many people believe that pagans may have a link to the ancestors that other faiths may lack. This is not to say that their perceptions of Avebury are more important or valid than other visitors, but it is important to recognise that they might be different.

Also, in relation to the beliefs of the prehistoric dead:

- We know or can know very little about the beliefs of the prehistoric dead (several similar).
- There is a body of evidence suggesting that prehistoric religious belief and practice were varied and that burial was not necessarily or always regarded as a final act (several similar).
- It is wrong to impose inappropriate beliefs and rituals on the prehistoric dead (several similar).

One group of those who are in favour of retention in the Museum disagreed or disagreed strongly with the statement in Q2. Some of their comments make it clear that they feel that the statement gives too much consideration to Druid and Pagan beliefs (otherwise their comments are similar to those made by others in favour of retention as summarised above):

- “EH and NT should no longer allow any form of worship by such groups in the Avebury landscape or at any other EH and NT sites”.
- “I do not think EH/NT should be seen to take these groups so seriously as to ‘recognise and respect’ their views.”
- “The statement does not seem firm enough to me; it suggests that there might be a slightly stronger significance of the remains and landscape to the members of CoBDO than to the rest of the general public, and I do not accept this.”

EH and NT response to comments: *It is clear that many people and groups value the Avebury landscape and its monuments and archaeological remains. We think that it is right to recognise and respect Druid and Pagan beliefs in this context. The issue is whether their beliefs relating to their continuity and connection with the landscape and remains gives CoBDO or other Druid and Pagan groups any greater rights than other people and groups. CoBDO themselves have made no such suggestion, and while other groups have suggested that there is some evidence of continuity, this does not seem to be sufficiently substantial to support such a claim. We agree with the comment that public opinion should be consulted and have taken steps to do this. We do not give great weight to the opinion surveys referred to in*

the draft report because they were not carried out in a way likely to give a reliable picture of public opinion.

3.2.2: The age of the remains, how they came into the care of the Museum, and the legal status of the Museums and the remains

These matters were set out in detail in Appendix 4 of the draft report. As they were thought to be essentially non-controversial, no specific question was asked; but respondents were asked to comment on these sections if they wished.

Few comments were made on these matters. Most agreed with and supported the draft report. The only frequent and substantial criticism, made by a number of those in favour of reburial, was that excavation of these human remains was inherently wrong in being disrespectful to the dead, and that this wrong should be redressed by reburial.

***EH and NT response to comments:** These human remains were excavated legally, properly and, as far as we are aware, without any criticism at the time, and have been cared for with respect and in accordance with accepted good practice. As present attitudes and past practices in relation to treatment of the dead are very variable, and as we know so little about past beliefs, we take the view that it is important to treat human remains with respect, but that we should not assume those who buried prehistoric human remains did so in the belief that it was important that they should not be disturbed.*

3.2.3: Question 3: Research history and potential

Sections 8 and 9 of the draft report sets out an account of the research history and potential of these human remains. Question 3 asked people to agree or disagree with the statement: “EH and the NT believe that the human remains have contributed and will continue to contribute in an important way to our understanding of the past.”. Replies are tabulated below:

Question 3: Do you agree or disagree with the statement: “EH and the NT believe that the human remains have contributed and will continue to contribute in an important way to our understanding of the past.”?							
Q3	Agree strongly	Agree	Disagree	Disagree strongly	Don't know	no reply	Total
Individuals	475+(1)	43+(1)	4	5	6	32	567
%	84	8	1	1	1	6	100
Groups	45+(1)	7+(6)	1	1	1	11	73
%	63	18	1	1	1	15	100

(Numbers are given in parentheses where the response was similar but not expressed precisely as in the pro-forma. Individual cell percentages sometimes add up to 99 or 101 because of rounding.)

Most respondents (84% of individuals and 63% of groups) agree strongly with this statement, and few (2% of individuals and 2% of groups) disagree.

Cross tabulation of the replies to Questions 3 and 4 shows that more of those who are in favour of reburial disagreed with the statement than those who were in favour of retention, who overwhelmingly agreed:

Respondents were invited to comment further on this statement and on Sections 8 and 9 of the Draft Report .

Comments from those in favour of reburial included:

- Respect for the dead is more important than the value of research on human remains (several similar)
- Human remains should be studied for a limited time and then reburied (several similar)
- Research can be done with photos and replicas (several similar)
- Human remains should be sampled for research and then reburied (several similar)
- Research on human remains is a “disgraceful abuse”
- Research on human remains is “disrespectful to the Avebury Goddess”
- Research on human remains produces “nothing relevant to Druid spiritual practice”
- “Would you dig up war graves to “understand soldiers”?

Comments from those in favour of retention included:

- Development of new techniques over the past 20-40 years provides clear evidence of the new understanding we will gain from application of future new techniques to human remains (many similar)
- It is important to retain human remains to apply particular new techniques for archaeological understanding: DNA and genetics, dating, isotopes for diet and movement, disease etc. (many similar)
- It is wrong to let minority pressure stand in way of interest of most of general public: “few oppose this research” (many similar)
- This research helps us to understand the human condition and our own humanity and mortality (several similar)
- Research into human remains is respectful to past people: “gift of information”; “continuing place in history”; “respect through study”; “integrates into present” (several similar)
- Human remains from prehistoric sites are a scarce resource and other sources of evidence are very limited (several similar) (several similar)
- It is our duty to future generations to retain these human remains rather than let them be destroyed or compromised by reburial(several similar)
- This research encourages interest in and protection of our heritage (several similar)
- Any damage done by excavation has been done; let us learn from them now
- Retention of human remains reduces the need for fresh excavations (several similar)
- It is important to keep human remains in order to check past scientific findings (several similar)
- It would be wrong to fossilise understanding by stopping this research

EH and NT response to comments: *It is clear that there is very wide acceptance of the value of research on human remains to increase our understanding of our past, and that new techniques are increasing this value. We regret that some respondents question the value and interest of this understanding; it is worth commenting that some Druids and Pagans clearly value this understanding, and that it appears to inform some Druid and Pagan beliefs and practices.*

4: Question 4: The future of the Avebury Museum human remains

Question 4 in the draft report set out three options. Replies are tabulated below:

Question 4: The future of the remains: which of the options set out in the report do you think is best?						
Q4	Reburial	Reburial with continuing public and research access	Retention in Museum with access where reasonable for CoBDO and other groups	Don't know	blank	Total
Individuals	20+(6)	22+(2)	493+(11)	5+(2)	6	567
%	5	4	89	1	1	100
Groups	3+(4)	4	46+(13)	-	3	73
%	10	5	81	0	4	100

(Numbers are given in parentheses where the response was similar but not expressed precisely as in the pro-forma. Individual cell percentages sometimes add up to 99 or 101 because of rounding.)

Most of those who replied – 89% of individuals and 81% of groups – are in favour of retention of the human remains in the Museum; 9% of individuals and 15% of groups are in favour of reburial, with or without continuing access. A number of respondents thought that other options should have been offered, including:

- Reburial but without religious rite (because any rite is likely to be inappropriate)
- Reburial but with retention of small samples for research
- Retention but without privileged access for religious groups

These have been added in parentheses in the table above; separate counts have not been given because others may have shared these views but felt constrained by the options offered.

Respondents were invited to comment further; these comments essentially repeated comments made elsewhere, and so are not repeated here. Essentially most of those who are in favour of retention in the Museum believe that this is important for future understanding; most of those who are in favour of reburial feel that this is important to show respect for the dead and their wishes.

EH and NT response: We believe that the value of increased understanding – both through public access, and by availability for further research, outweigh considerations of respect for the dead in this case, particularly as we know little about their beliefs, provided that the remains of the dead are treated appropriately.

Respondents were asked to comment on the practicability of reburial with continuing access. The vast majority of those who replied thought that this was an unsatisfactory and impracticable compromise – that it would be expensive, problematic for the security and conservation of the human remains and, at the same time, would not satisfy many of those who believe in the importance of permanent burial.

EH and NT response to comments: We agree with these views.

5: Conclusions

73 groups and 567 individuals replied to the consultation.

Opinion was in general in favour of the use of the DCMS process (by about 5:1), and in favour of this consultation (by about 7:1). However opinion about the moratorium was more divided (about 2:1 in favour); and 30-40% of respondents either felt uncertain about these process issues, or did not reply.

Most respondents shared EH's and the NT's view that the relationship between those making the request and the Avebury human remains was not "direct and close" in the sense meant in the DCMS guidance. Most respondents also felt that the contribution of human remains to an understanding of the past is important.

89% of individuals and 81% of groups were in favour of retaining the human remains in the Avebury Museum because of their importance for understanding the past. Few thought that the possible compromise of reburial with continuing research access was a good solution, as it was likely to be expensive and unsatisfactory.

While we tried to engage a wide range of groups and individuals, and the response was larger than we had expected, we recognise that those who respond to consultations of this kind are self-selected and not necessarily representative. We have therefore decided to carry out a public opinion survey to address this issue.

References

DCMS 2005, *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums*.
(<http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/GuidanceHumanRemains11Oct.pdf>)

Thackray D and Payne S 2008, *Draft report on the request for the reburial of human remains from the Alexander Keiller Museum at Avebury*. National Trust, Swindon and English Heritage, London.
(www.english-heritage.org.uk/aveburyreburialconsultation)

Appendix I Letter of invitation to comment

CONSULTATION ON REQUEST FOR REBURIAL OF PREHISTORIC HUMAN REMAINS IN THE ALEXANDER KEILLER MUSEUM, AVEBURY, WILTSHIRE

Dear Consultee,

In 2006, English Heritage (EH) and the National Trust (NT) received a request from Paul Davies, Reburial Officer of the Council of British Druid Orders, for the reburial of prehistoric human remains from archaeological excavations in the Avebury area, which are currently in the Alexander Keiller Museum at Avebury.

As this request raises wider and sensitive issues, and the way in which it is resolved will set precedents, as Avebury is a World Heritage Site, and as the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) has recently issued Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums which included recommendations for responding to requests for return of human remains, EH and the NT decided to follow this guidance in responding to this request, and have for the past eighteen months been assembling the relevant information.

As there are potentially many groups and individuals who have an interest and views on this request, it was agreed that the draft report and assembled information should be made available for comment by other interested parties before EH and the NT make any decisions. These have therefore been posted on the EH and NT websites at www.english-heritage.org.uk/aveburyreburialconsultation and www.thenationaltrust.org.uk/remains.

We would welcome your comments on this report; these should be received by 31 January 2009. A proforma for replies is included on the website. It would be appreciated if you would use this and reply through the website if possible, as this will speed the process of analysing the replies.

If, however, you prefer to comment by letter or e-mail, please send your comments to: Sebastian Payne, Avebury Reburial Consultation, English Heritage, 1 Waterhouse Square, 138-142 Holborn, EC1 2ST, (Tel: 0207 973 3321), or by e-mail to avebury.reburialconsultation@english-heritage.org.uk. If you would like paper copies of any of the papers referred to in this letter, please write to the same address.

Any other interested group or individual is also very welcome to comment; we would be grateful if you would pass this invitation on to such groups or individuals that you may be aware of. A list of those to whom this letter is being sent has also been posted on the website.

A list of comments received will be appended to the final report and recommendations; in keeping with EH's policy under the Freedom of Information Act, all the comments received may be made publicly available.

With best wishes,

David Thackray
Head of Archaeology
National Trust

Sebastian Payne
Chief Scientist
English Heritage

Enclosures: Executive Summary of draft report
Notes on consultation process

Appendix 2 List of those to whom the letter of invitation was sent

Organisations:

APACBE (Advisory Panel for the Archaeology of Christian Burials in England)
ASLaN (Ancient Sacred Landscape Network)
Association for Environmental Archaeology
Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth
Avebury Parish Council
British Association for Biological Anthropology and Osteoarchaeology
British Association for the Study of Religions
British Druid Order
British Museum
Cadw
Department of Archaeology, University of Cambridge
The Cotswold Order of Druids
Council for British Archaeology
CBA Wessex
The Council of British Druid Orders
The Dolmen Grove
The Druid Network
Historic Scotland
Honouring the Ancient Dead
ICOMOS UK
Institute of Field Archaeologists
Kennett District Council
Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Wales, Lampeter
Religion & Society Programme, Lancaster University
Leicester Museum
Loyal Arthurian Warband
Manchester Museum
Museums Association
Museums Libraries & Archives Council
Natural History Museum
The Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids
The Pagan Association
The Pagan Federation
Pebble (The Public Bodies Liaison Committee for British Paganism)
The Prehistoric Society
Rescue: the British Archaeological Trust
Royal Archaeological Institute
Salisbury & South Wiltshire Museum
Society of Antiquaries of London
Society of Museum Archaeologists
SSN on Human Remains
Standing Conference of Archaeological Unit Managers
Subject Committee For Archaeology
Wellcome Collection
Wessex Archaeology
Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society,
Wiltshire Heritage Museum
World Archaeology Congress

Individuals:

Dr J Blain
Prof R Bradley
Prof D Brothwell
Prof Martin Carver
Sue Cawthorn
Prof Andrew Chamberlain
Prof. Tim Darvill
Maurice Davies
Prof Robert Foley
Dr Graham Harvey
Prof Simon Hillson
Prof Ronald Hutton
Prof Martin Jones
Dr Trevor Kirk
Dr Christopher Knusel
Andrew Lawson
Prof Robert Layton
Prof M Parker-Pearson
Mike Pitts
Dr Joshua Pollard
Prof Mark Pollard
Julian Richards
Prof Charlotte Roberts
Dr Anthony Sinclair
Prof Chris Stringer
Dr Hedley Swain
Prof Julian Thomas
Prof G Wainwright
Dr. Robert Wallis
Prof Alasdair Whittle

Appendix 3 Reply pro-forma

Fields marked with an asterisk * are required fields.

If you need more space than the form provides, you are welcome to include additional pages.

RESPONDENT INFORMATION

Name of person making comments *

Address *

Postcode *

Are you making comments as *

- an individual
 representing a group or organisation

If representing a group or organisation, in what capacity?

Please can you tell us something about your organisation?

email address if available:

COMMENTS

Question 1:

Please see Draft Report, Section 3: The status of those making the request and continuity with the remains.

EH and the NT currently take the view that the genetic relationship between members of CoBDO and the Avebury human remains, which is presumably shared with most of the population of Western Europe, is not a “direct and close relationship” in the sense meant in the DCMS Guidance.

- Agree strongly
 Agree
 Don't know
 Disagree
 Disagree strongly

Any other comments on Section 3 of the Draft Report?:

Question 2:

Please see Draft Report, Section 4: The cultural, spiritual and religious significance of the remains

EH and the NT recognise and respect the importance of the Avebury landscape and these human remains to CoBDO and other Druid and Pagan groups; at the same time they recognise and respect the cultural and spiritual significance to many others as well.

- Agree strongly
- Agree
- Don't know
- Disagree
- Disagree strongly

Any other comments on Section 4 of the Draft Report?

Please see Draft Report, Section 5: The age of the remains

Any comments on Section 5 of the Draft Report?

Please see Draft Report, Section 6: How the remains came into the care of the museum

Any comments on Section 6 of the Draft Report?

Please see Draft Report, Section 7: The status of the remains within the Museum
Any comments on Section 7 of the Draft Report?

Question 3:

Please see Draft Report, Section 8: The scientific, educational and historical value of the remains

EH and the NT believe that the human remains have contributed and will continue to contribute in an important way to our understanding of our past.

- Agree strongly
- Agree
- Don't know
- Disagree
- Disagree strongly

Any other comments on Section 8 of the Draft Report?

Please see Draft Report, Section 9: How the remains have been used in the past
Any comments on Section 9 of the Draft Report?

Question 4:

Please see Draft Report, Sections 10 and 11: The future of the remains
Which of the options set out in the report do you think is best

- Reburial
- Reburial with continuing public and research access
- Retention in Museum with access where reasonable for CoBDO and other groups
- Don't know

and why

Please give your views on the practicability and cost of Option B (Reburial with continuing public and research access).

Any other comments on Sections 10 and 11 of the Draft Report?

Are there other comments you would like to make, or other things you think should be considered?

Question 5:

Please see Draft Report, Section 1: Use of DCMS process as set out in Guidance for the care of human remains in museums. (See report for web reference)

Is the DCMS process appropriate for consideration of this request?

- Very appropriate
- Appropriate
- Uncertain
- Inappropriate
- Very inappropriate
- Don't know

If not, why? – and what process would have been more appropriate?

Question 6:

Please see Draft Report, Section 2: History of case and nature of request

Was the limited moratorium on destructive sampling appropriate in the circumstances?

- Very appropriate
- Appropriate
- Uncertain
- Inappropriate
- Very inappropriate
- Don't know

Or should different action have been taken?

Question 7:

Is this form of consultation appropriate?

- Very appropriate
- Appropriate
- Uncertain
- Inappropriate
- Very inappropriate
- Don't know

If not, why? – and what process would have been better?

Any other comments on sections 1 and 2 of the Draft Report?

Any other comments you wish to make?

Appendix 4 Groups and organisations which responded to the consultation

Advisory Panel on the Archaeology of Christian Burials in England
Ancient Sacred Landscape Network (ASLaN)
Archaeology Team, School of Historical Studies, Newcastle University
Association for Environmental Archaeology
Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth
Avebury Group
Avebury Parish Council
Avon Valley Archaeological Society
Berengaria Order of Druids
Brigantia Archaeological Practice
British Association for Biological Anthropology and Osteoarchaeology
British Druid Order
British Excavation Volunteers & Archaeological Research Society
British Humanist Association
British Humanists Association Science Group.
Bronze Age Forum
Chiltern Humanists
Cirencester College Archaeology Department
Cornwall County Council
Cotswold Order of Druids
Council for British Archaeology
Council of British Druid Orders, Loyal Arthurian Warband and Free and Open Gorsedd of Caer Abiri (Avebury)
Council of British Druid Orders*
Department of Archaeology, Durham University
European Association of Archaeologists
Genesis Order of Druids
Greater Manchester Archaeological Unit
Hampshire County Museums Service
Helmsley Archaeological and Historical Society
Honouring the Ancient Dead
Huddersfield and District Archaeological Society
Icenorum Living History Group
Institute for Archaeologists
Institute for Archaeo-Metallurgical Studies
International Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies, Newcastle University
Kowethas Bran Gwyn and Pagan Elders Group
Leeds Museums and Galleries
Lenham Archaeological Society
List of all groups and organisations which sent in replies
Local History Group (Birmingham)
Manchester facial reconstruction team
Manchester Museum
McDonald Institute and Department of Archaeology, Cambridge University
Megalithic Portal
Museum of London Archaeology
Museum of London Centre for Human Bioarchaeology
Museums Association
Museums, Libraries and Archives Council
National Museums Scotland
National Secular Society
National Trust for Scotland
Natural History Museum

Pagans for Archaeology
Phoenix Order of Druids
Pomegranate
Prehistoric Society
PrifGofalwres, Druids of West Wales
RESCUE
Sacred Order of The Black Cat
Sacred Sites, Contested Rites/Rights Project
Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum
School of Archaeology, University of Oxford
Secular Order of Druids
Society for Church Archaeology
Society of Antiquaries of London
Society of Antiquaries of Scotland
Society of Museum Archaeologists
Surrey Archaeological Society
Sussex Archaeological Society
University of Bristol Spelaeological Society Museum
Wessex Region, Council for British Archaeology
Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society.
World Archaeological Congress Repatriation Committee.
Yorkshire Archaeological Society

* Two different organisations with this name responded – one was the organisation that originally made the request.

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