

Dear Mr Taylor

I have read the Museums Association's response to the Avebury human remains consultation on the MA website, and am writing to express my reservations and disappointment at the MA's short-sighted view and to point out key aspects which it appears to have ignored in its response.

- Several commentators have pointed out that the Avebury process emphasised the predominance of scientific values over social values. Its default position was one of scientific value and of the axiomatic authority of archaeologists. For the MA to support such a biased framework, within which there was no room for collaboration, and no strategy for dealing with emotional and spiritual views or philosophical debate, seems incongruous for a museums organisation.

The DCMS Guidance has been widely criticised for its lack of relevance to the British situation – that, indeed, any 'claim' by any British community against its criteria would be bound to fail - and not a single effective response to any of those criticisms has ever been made. I cannot understand how the MA can support such a process as being effective, ethical, and impartial. I would call on the MA to support the calls for a thorough review of the DCMS Guidance, with wide consultation, and inclusion of criteria specific to British human remains and those with an interest in them.

- There are other museum processes of consultation over reburial of human remains that are more robust than the Avebury one, e.g. the current Manchester Museum consultation, where at least the option for reburial is explicitly given equal weight to that of retention. In that sense, it is wholly inappropriate for the MA to continue to regard Avebury as a precedent, since it is likely to be overtaken very shortly by far more ethical and inclusive processes from museums which take a more balanced view between scientific and social (including spiritual) value.

- On a more particular note, HAD (which represents a wide spectrum of Pagan views on human remains) in its response to the Avebury consultation did point out the marginal role of CoBDO within the Pagan community. The MA could be more effective by encouraging English Heritage and the National Trust to widen out their debates and discussions around consultations to include broader views, rather than picking on a self-evidently small and marginal group and claiming that process as some sort of precedent. HAD, though not supportive of the CoBDO claim, did nevertheless fully support its right to make such a request as an expression of special interest on religious and spiritual grounds – and it is the integration of such religious and spiritual interests into the decision-making process as valid criteria which I would expect the MA to understand and support.

I look forward to your response.

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