

A303 Stonehenge Highways England Consultation – the response from Honouring the Ancient Dead

Highways England (HE) plans along the A303, A358 and A30 to create a world-class Expressway to link the south west and south east of England.

The A303 currently runs through the Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites World Heritage Site, past Stonehenge, and through the village of Winterbourne Stoke and ‘improvement’ of this section is the first of the proposals to create the expressway to go to public consultation.

What HE is proposing

Between Amesbury and Berwick Down, HE states that “we need a free-flowing dual carriageway to replace the current single carriageway section which runs past Stonehenge and through the village of Winterbourne Stoke.”

The proposed solution is to build a 1.8 mile (2.9 kilometre) tunnel under the World Heritage Site (WHS), a bypass for Winterbourne Stoke and improve the existing junctions between the A303 and the intersecting A345 and A360.

The HE scheme webpage states: “As well as easing congestion, improving life for local communities and reducing the risk of accidents, we believe our proposals will improve the setting of Stonehenge and other important monuments within the WHS.”

HAD approached its response by focusing on the impact the proposals will have on the potential disturbance of ancestors and disruption to evidence of ancestral activity within the wider Stonehenge landscape.

The responses given were as follows:

Question 1 To what extent do you agree with our proposed option?

HAD response: Strongly disagree

HAD strongly disagrees with the proposed option. HAD has approached this response by focusing on the following priorities:

- Avoid or minimise any damage to any known or possible sites where physical evidence of ancestors may be found
- Avoid or minimise any damage to known or potential sites where evidence of ancestors is less likely
- Avoid or minimise physical impact or visual intrusion on any known or potential alignments within the broader WHS landscape noting in particular the alignments from Stonehenge itself

The current proposed option is one where there will be vast earthworks wholly within the WHS; the construction of a bored tunnel with large entry portals at both the east and western entrance will cause massive destruction to the precious archaeology of the area and will inevitably result in the disturbance of the physical evidence of ancestors (more commonly termed 'ancestral remains'). It will cause irreversible damage to the world heritage site and entirely unnecessary disturbance to ancestral burial areas. In the view of HAD this is unacceptable.

Specific objections to the plans are laid out in the questions below, but include the potential risk to the Mesolithic Blick Mead site, the proximity of the eastern portal to the Avenue and the nearby Kings Barrows, the alignment of the western portal with the midwinter sunset, as well as the significant risk of disturbance and destruction of evidence of ancestors in surrounding burials and throughout the length of the proposed works.

The only option that minimises these criteria is the southerly route as proposed in Option 2 (Corridor F). It is cheaper to construct, less destructive, wholly avoids the WHS and meets all the criteria of the project as set out in the Highways England booklet "A303 Stonehenge - Amesbury to Berwick Down - The case for the scheme".

Question 2 To what extent do you agree with our proposed location of the eastern portal?

Strongly disagree

The eastern portal appears to have been designed to minimise damage to any extant and known archaeology and will have little or no visual impact from Stonehenge. However, it will be very close to the Avenue (notwithstanding that it allows the Avenue to be 'reunited') and a need for a detailed archaeological survey seems to be needed to be certain damage is minimised. Given the scale of the work in constructing the portal and the proximity of the Kings Barrows, HAD believes there is a significant risk that evidence of ancestors will be found. Given that risk HAD cannot support the current plans for the location of the eastern portal, and believes it needs to be moved further eastward and outside of the WHS.

There must be a concern that lighting could be installed at this site at a later date. If (and this would be against the wishes of HAD) the eastern portal is constructed in its currently planned location there has to be a formal written legally binding guarantee that lighting will not be installed at some later date.

Question 3 To what extent do you agree with our proposed location of the western portal?

Strongly disagree

If the southern Winterbourne Stoke bypass option is chosen the western portal has significant risk of damage to evidence of our ancestors given its proximity to known burial sites, with the planned route immediately adjacent the western portal going immediately beneath barrow burials. As stated previously, this will cause irreversible damage to the world heritage site and entirely unnecessary disturbance to ancestral burial areas.

The western portal as proposed is in direct alignment with the midwinter sunset when viewed from Stonehenge. The realigned A303 will therefore approach the western portal in direct alignment with the midwinter sunset, and as the road will be at a higher elevation than the portal it will be clearly visible from Stonehenge itself, creating a stream of traffic headlights moving across the horizon and disrupting the setting sun. Given the significance of alignments to those who constructed this landscape, this is totally unacceptable and must be revised. As with the eastern portal the possibility of additional lighting being added at a later date cannot be discounted.

The HAD position is that if a tunnel is constructed any western portal must be away from the current proposed alignment and outside the WHS.

Question 4 Of the two possible routes for the Winterbourne Stoke bypass which do you consider is the best route?

No preference

By indicating we have no preference to either the northern bypass or the southern bypass we are not indicating that HAD is ambivalent to the proposals, but that neither of the options given are acceptable.

HAD believes that the northern route for the Winterbourne Stoke bypass will have an impact on the environment and on local burial sites as well as Roman and post-Roman sites. However, the southern choice will result in a major impact on Stonehenge from the siting of the A303/A360 junction - see question 6 below. HAD have therefore come to the conclusion we cannot support either of the options given in this consultation.

Question 5 What are the most important issues for you as we develop our proposals for the A303/A345 Countess junction?

The proximity of the Mesolithic site Blick Mead to the immediate south of this proposed work gives cause for concern. This site is of huge significance and there

is the possibility of damage to the site, particularly from changes in the water table during and after completion any construction work, which may result in damage to waterlogged deposits along this part of the River Avon. Some archaeologists have suggested there is likely to be evidence of ancestors in and around the area of the proposed changes and these must be taken in to consideration. Moving the current alignment of the A303 slightly further north would mitigate some of the effect of this work on Blick Mead, but would involve the demolition of some properties.

Question 6 What are the most important issues for you as we develop our proposals for the A303/A360 Longbarrow junction?

The location of the A303-A360 junction is dependent on whether the northern or southern option for the Winterbourne Stoke bypass is chosen. If the southern bypass option is chosen this junction will lie in alignment with the midwinter sunset when viewed from Stonehenge; there is significant risk of light pollution from traffic heading in an easterly direction and from any lighting incorporated in the design of this junction. It appears that the location of this junction will be on the current horizon line of Stonehenge and therefore any such pollution will be highly visible from that location. Therefore if, against the recommendation of HAD, the current plans go ahead the proposed location of the A303/A360 junction needs to be moved.

Question 7 Do you have any other comments?

The ancestors are part of the Stonehenge landscape; the land and the ancestors cannot be separated here. As an initiative, we believe in respect for our ancestors and the evidence they have left behind; therefore if the project does go ahead, when ancestors are found and exhumed, all interested parties must be informed, including HAD. This includes not just the archaeological teams, but others for whom these places are crucially sacred. There must be opportunity for ritual to honour those who have been disturbed.

HAD takes the position that no ancestors should be unnecessarily exhumed but that where it takes place exhumation licences must be readily available for public scrutiny. HAD will expect reburial, even if it may be after a clearly defined and limited period of scientific study of the bones or ashes.

Throughout this document HAD has shown that it is not acceptable to build a tunnel and associated portals wholly within the World Heritage Site. The site of Stonehenge and the surrounding environment is a unique, precious and fragile area rich in the evidence of our ancestors. As recent discoveries have shown, there is nowhere within the WHS that can be considered devoid of ancestral activity and influence.

In the view of HAD only the southerly route wholly outside the WHS can mitigate the problems and destruction the current proposal presents. The potential damage to Blick Mead in the east at the Countess Roundabout, the physical damage that will be inevitable at both the eastern and western portals, the light pollution that will be caused by both traffic and street lighting - either potential at both portals, or actual at the A303/A360 junction - shows that the currently proposed route is unacceptable. As we have stated before in this document, the proposals as they stand will do irreversible damage to the world heritage site and entirely unnecessary disturbance to ancestral burial areas.

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