

THE STONEHENGE ALLIANCE

From the Chairman, George McDonic, MBE, BL, DIPLTP, DPA, FFB

Mr Derek Parody
Project Director for A303 Stonehenge
Major Projects Complex Infrastructure Programme
Temple Quay House
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Sent by email on 1 December 2017

Dear Mr Parody,

A303 Stonehenge improvement

As non-statutory consultees, we are unable to express our concerns formally at this stage to the Planning Inspectorate about issues relating to consultation on the A303 Stonehenge project and the Scoping Report. We have only just been made aware of the document *Planning Act 2008: Guidance on the pre-application process* (DCLG 2015) and note, under para.88 of that document, that we should advise Highways England of our concerns in the first instance. We were also unaware until recently of Highways England's 'Statement of Community Consultation' which we understand will be considered by Wiltshire Council and will not be available to us. Since we have learned of the above-mentioned documents late in the day, we are copying this letter to Wiltshire Council and to the Inspectorate, for information.

Most of our concerns about consultation relate to the World Heritage Site (WHS) and may be familiar to you from our 3 March 2017 response to the pre-statutory consultation and my letter to Mr Taylor of 29 October. We would therefore be grateful for your formal response, please, on the following matters.

1. CONSULTATION

1.1. As pointed out in our response to the 2017 pre-statutory consultation, only one option for widening the A303 across the WHS was offered (a 2.9km tunnel) with bypass options for Winterbourne Stoke. Insufficient information was provided in accompanying documents to gain informed views on such key issues as archaeology, biodiversity and landscape on the tunnel option and the route variants to the west of it in order adequately to assess or to contribute to the decision-making process undertaken by Highways England.

Detailed information about alternative options, including longer tunnels, which would have protected the WHS was lacking; and no convincing evidence-backed reasons were given why such options were rejected. No helpful comparative data was given, for example, on the southern WHS bypass option (F10) earlier identified by Highways England and considered in the Technical Appraisal Report, or on why it was rejected.

1.2. Representatives of our supporter-organisations attended meetings of the AAJV Traffic and Access Stakeholder Group (also named the Transport and Access Working Group), the objectives of which were, according to the Technical Appraisal Report, Table 19.1:

“Obtain survey data - Seek agreement on methodology for optioneering and assessment - Seek views on shortlisted options.”

The meetings comprised standard presentations of the needs, aims, benefits etc. of the scheme, inviting comments on issues to be taken into account. No information was given on methodology for optioneering or shortlisted options, despite our requests for it.

One of our representatives attended a ‘Heritage Specialist Forum’ which again comprised a standard ‘needs and benefits of the scheme’ presentation. There was no useful information about archaeological work undertaken; and there were no follow-up notes.

1.3. In view of the importance of the WHS and international interest in it, the consultation was not made sufficiently broad in extent by Highways England. The great majority of responses were instigated independently through alerts on the websites of the Stonehenge Alliance and Friends of the Earth.

1.4. Of the 9000+ responses to the consultation, we note that the 77% of respondents who expressed concern with the scheme in principle did not have their issues addressed in the consultation analysis. It would appear that Highways England conducted the consultation not on whether the scheme was acceptable in principle but with the intention of adapting a pre-determined scheme according to suggestions made by those whose responses were helpful in progressing it. Furthermore, we were told when we met you and Chris Taylor on 17 October 2017 that greater weight had been given to the responses of bodies who spoke on behalf of a large membership. The Stonehenge Alliance supporter-organisations, however, have a combined membership of many thousands.

1.5. The ‘preferred route’ of the 2.9km tunnel (and its western options) departs significantly from that on which the pre-statutory consultation took place. It is apparent that up-to-date information on the historic (including archaeology) and the natural environment along the preferred route was lacking at the time of the preferred route announcement, and may still be lacking.

1.6. Furthermore, Highways England has not mentioned, in its documentation on the preferred route, the conflict between the HIAs of Highways England and the advice of UNESCO in relation to a 2.9km tunnel across the WHS. Mr Taylor has advised us that this is something that the DCMS will be discussing with UNESCO but it is hardly satisfactory to announce the preferred route in advance of the outcome of that discussion, unless the government has no interest in UNESCO’s advice.

2. METHODOLOGY USED FOR HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT (HIA)

2.1. The requirement, under the World Heritage (WH) Convention, planning policy and the WHS Management Plan, is protection of the WHS and its setting in order to sustain its

outstanding universal value (OUV). WHSs are heritage assets of the highest significance (NPPF, para.132).

2.2. Assessment of impacts on a WHS and its setting is not exactly the same as assessment of impacts on attributes of OUV but, clearly, the outcomes of these assessments must be compatible, since protection of the WHS is required and thus ensures protection of its OUV (see, e.g., UNESCO's *Operational Guidelines* 96-100). The former exercise is set out under the UNESCO *Operational Guidelines* and national and local planning policy, while the latter is set out in the ICOMOS Guidelines on HIA for cultural WH properties, the use of which is advised by Historic England.

2.3. It is clear that there is a fundamental lack of understanding concerning HIA for the WHS on the part of Highways England. Little consideration appears to have been given to the WHS as a heritage asset in its own right, subject (with its setting) to specific planning and international Convention safeguards. Instead, mainly heritage assets such as scheduled monuments and other attributes of OUV within the WHS and their settings have been taken into account in Highways England's HIAs. While HIA methodology for TAG Unit A3 chapter 8 and in the DMRB involves a scoring and balancing exercise, the ICOMOS guidance on HIA does not include a *balancing* exercise.

2.4. As the second UNESCO WH Centre/ICOMOS advisory mission rightly pointed out, HIA following ICOMOS' guidance shows that a southern bypass option (F10) would best protect the WHS and its OUV. The outcome of the HIA following ICOMOS' guidance cannot be used to suggest, via a balancing exercise, that benefits of a tunnel to part of the WHS can offset damage to the WHS elsewhere. Protection of OUV requires concomitant protection of the WHS and its setting.

3. INSUFFICIENT WEIGHT GIVEN TO PROTECTION OF THE WHS AND ITS SETTING.

3.1. Unfortunately, it has long been apparent that protection of the WHS and its setting has not been a strong consideration in the A303 Stonehenge project. Indeed, the 2.9km tunnel was brought forward in December 2014 on the basis of 'affordability, deliverability and value for money', along with the support of English Heritage (now Historic England) and the National Trust, neither body appearing to be either familiar with or inclined to respect the WH Convention or planning policy for the WHS.

3.2. One of our member-organisations represented on the A303/A30/A350 Corridor Feasibility Study Group in 2014 repeatedly expressed concerns about the 2.9km tunnel. It is minuted that the opinion of ICOMOS-UK (a member of the Study Group) was not sought on the 2.9km tunnel proposal. The CPRE Wiltshire representative advised that "should the 2.9km tunnel scheme for Stonehenge go forward, there would be a risk of a legal challenge and/or the WHS being placed on the List of WH in Danger": a request for this to be minuted as an amendment was agreed but amended minutes appear not to have been circulated to all members of the Study Group.

3.3. On 5 November 2014 ICOMOS-UK wrote to the Secretaries of State for Transport and Culture Media and Sport, advising them of the need to consult UNESCO's WH Committee about the project, and saying:

“We appreciate the very real need to address the issue of the A303 and recognise that a tunnel could have beneficial impacts on parts of the WH property. However, we are concerned that associated portals and dual carriageways could have a highly adverse impact on other parts of the WH landscape that cannot be set aside however great the benefits of a tunnel.”

3.4. The 2.9km tunnel scheme has continued apace, despite the above early advice and the subsequent advice of two UNESCO WH Centre/ICOMOS advisory missions who were invited to Stonehenge in 2015 and 2017. The first mission understood that no scheme options were on the table and its report concentrated on principles, notably in relation to heritage impact assessments to identify an optimal solution. The second mission, arriving during the period of pre-statutory consultation on a 2.9km tunnel and expressway options, made it very clear that a 2.9km tunnel would not be acceptable, and pointed out that the HIAs undertaken clearly showed that the F10 bypass option, abandoned by Highways England, was not only less expensive than the 2.9km tunnel option but would also have less impact on the WHS and its OUV.

3.5. The WH Centre’s report to the WH Committee in 2017 summarised the conclusions of the second advisory mission, saying, as ICOMOS-UK had done more than two years before,

“It is not considered satisfactory to suggest that the benefits from a 2.9km tunnel to the centre of the property can offset significant damage from lengths of four lane approach roads in cuttings elsewhere in the property.”

The WH Committee met in July 2017 and item 6 of its Decision on Stonehenge

“Urges the State Party to explore further options with a view to avoiding impacts on the OUV of the property, including

- a) The F10 non-tunnel by-pass option to the south of the property,*
- b) Longer tunnel options to remove dual carriageway cuttings from the property and further detailed investigations regarding tunnel alignment and both east and west portal locations.”*

Nevertheless, the ‘preferred route’ with a 2.9km tunnel on a changed alignment was announced on 12 September, in absolute disregard of the advice of UNESCO’s WH Committee.

3.6. Clearly, UNESCO’s advice was not given on a whim. It was soundly based on the obligations the UK Government accepted in signing the World Heritage Convention, as well as UNESCO’s Guidelines on the operation of the Convention and ICOMOS’ Guidelines on HIA for cultural WH properties.

3.7. Relevant planning advice indicates that damage to a WHS may be considered necessary in the public interest (though the consequences for the WH designation of doing so are not explained). The public interest has, so far, not been put forward as justification for the 2.9km tunnel scheme. It must, however, now be obvious that unless the project is reconsidered, the WH designation will come under threat.

IN CONCLUSION

We believe Highways England's consultations to date have been inadequate and to strongly conflict with advice in paras. 68 and probably also paras. 73–4 of *Planning Act 2008: Guidance on the pre-application process* (DCLG 2015).

On these grounds alone and, most particularly, concerning the advice sought from and given by international advisory missions and UNESCO, we suggest that the 'preferred route' should be set aside forthwith and the WH Committee's advice followed in seeking a more appropriate option for the WHS, should the scheme still be under consideration at all, given its current low to medium value-for-money scoring based on Highways England's perceived 'benefits' to the WHS that UNESCO does not accept. (*See*: Scheme Assessment Report, Vol. I, para. 10.5.12)

A targeted consultation might, perhaps, be undertaken, as allowed for under para. 76 of *Planning Act 2008: Guidance on the pre-application process* but the incompatibility of the preferred route with the government's obligations under the WH Convention, UNESCO's advice and the suite of planning safeguards for the WHS almost certainly demands a radical rethink before further expenditure of money, time and effort.

I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

George McDonic
Chairman, the Stonehenge Alliance

- cc. The Planning Inspectorate, National Infrastructure Directorate, Bristol
Parvis Khansari, Service Director for Highways & Transport, Wiltshire Council
Cllr Bridget Wayman, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Waste,
Wiltshire Council

THE STONEHENGE ALLIANCE IS SUPPORTED BY:
Ancient Sacred Landscape Network; Campaign for Better Transport;
Campaign to Protect Rural England; Friends of the Earth; and
RESCUE: The British Archaeological Trust