

A303 Stonehenge consultation feedback from a consortium of Stonehenge experts

23 April 2018

About us

We, the signatories to this contribution to the consultation, are senior archaeologists who have carried out internationally recognised research within the Stonehenge WHS within the last ten years or more. Most of us are employed by UK universities; many were employees of various universities or of English Heritage when doing that research. Seven of us are members of the Scientific Committee of the A303 Stonehenge – Amesbury to Berwick Down scheme.

Together, we have been responsible for many of the major discoveries of recent times. We ask this submission be noted with the respect due to the large group of proven experts who have compiled it. This text has been jointly written; it represents our shared collective view.

In a public consultation, responses are often measured by counting: X respondents preferred option 1, Y preferred option 2. We ask that this submission not be treated in that way. In constructive spirit, we have made a collective expert group and make this submission, which we respectfully ask be considered in its own right, not just as another view, informed or not, to be counted amongst the Xs or the Ys.

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The major negative consequences of the tunnel options (D061 & D062) are:

1. The creation of new sections of dual carriageway and slip roads (and temporary roads during works) beyond the tunnel but still within the boundary of the WHS would entail large-scale destructive development within this WHS, potentially threatening its status and integrity and setting a dangerous precedent.
2. The westerly section of new road would cut through the densest concentration of Neolithic long barrows in Britain, thus compromising the integrity of this unusual and nationally important group of burial monuments belonging to the millennium prior to Stonehenge.
3. The westerly section of new road would also destroy part of a major Bronze Age settlement of national importance. Only part of this settlement is statutorily protected as a scheduled ancient monument but that part which is not scheduled is of equal value.

4. At its eastern end, construction of the tunnel portal here may have an effect on groundwater conditions which could detrimentally impact the survival of nationally important Mesolithic remains at Blick Mead.

THE WESTERN SECTION: Winterbourne Stoke bypass to Longbarrow junction

Q1. Please provide us with any comments you may have on our proposals for the viaduct crossing of the River Till valley.

Q2. Please provide us with any comments you may have on our proposals for the A303/A360 Longbarrow junction.

Q3. Do you have any other comments about our proposals for the western section of the scheme (Winterbourne Stoke bypass to Longbarrow junction)?

THE CENTRAL SECTION: Within the World Heritage Site

Q4: Please provide us with any comments you may have on our proposals for the green bridge (No.4) at or near the western boundary of the World Heritage Site.

Whilst this is an attempt to join up the north and south halves of the WHS in this area, where they will be even more fully severed by the road line, this is inadequate both in terms of the preservation of archaeological remains within the WHS and in terms of the setting of these and other remains, including the long barrows and round barrows here. Whilst the cut will require an unacceptable level of destruction within the WHS (see Q5), the green bridge is an unsatisfactory, low-budget attempt at a cut-and-cover solution to improve the setting of monuments and sites in this part of the WHS. The tunnel should simply be longer, so that no such green bridge is required.

Part of the point of a tunnel or new route is to re-unite the northern and southern parts of the WHS, which are split by the present surface A303 – a road so busy it is dangerous to try to cross it on foot. But the archaeology is just as important in this western area as further east. It is definitely desirable to re-unite this part of the landscape so that one could walk between the Winterbourne Stoke and Lake barrow groups. But the present proposal would only allow a single point of access across the road, and leave a far larger blot on the landscape than exists at present.

Q5: Please provide us with any comments you may have on our proposals for the cutting on the western approach to the tunnel.

This south-western approach to Stonehenge was important not only during the Bronze Age, after the stones of Stonehenge were put up, but much earlier – before the age of Stonehenge.

This westerly section of new road would cut a c.40m-wide swathe through the densest concentration of Neolithic long barrows in Britain, thus compromising the integrity of this unusual and nationally important group of burial monuments belonging to the millennium prior to Stonehenge. It is becoming apparent that the unusual density of long barrows in this area of the WHS to the west of Stonehenge is unparalleled anywhere else in Neolithic Britain, an observation enhanced by the discovery of two new long barrows in this area during survey and evaluation in 2016-2017 for the road scheme. The presence of such a remarkable cluster of such monuments in a restricted area immediately west of Stonehenge raises important questions about the significance of place concerning prehistoric people in deciding to locate Stonehenge where it is.

Important visual components of the landscape here are three famous barrow cemeteries, specifically the huge Neolithic long barrows at Winterbourne Stoke and Lake. Together standing sentinel over the southwestern approach to Stonehenge, they would have been significant to those occupying the intervening valley. Their prominence a full two millennia after construction – a length of time equivalent to a Roman construction being still of compelling significance to ourselves in the 21st century – is evident from the construction of a Late Bronze Age linear ditch that runs between them.

There are other, vitally important examples of these singular and archaic long barrows here: another is extant to the north of the woodland known as The Diamond; a now-levelled example is in the field system close to the A360. Additionally within view is yet another, the superb and well-preserved long barrow on the southern flank of Normanton Down, with a mysterious and now-levelled ‘mortuary enclosure’ alongside. There is another at Normanton Gorse, and recent evaluations have encountered another two. So we have as many as eight of these Early Neolithic long barrows across that part of the valley where the cutting would be placed. Such a grouping of long barrows in a small area is *unique* in the world, not just unusual. It shows that this area was out-of-the-ordinary significance during the Early Neolithic period. We can expect that the fast-evolving techniques of field archaeology will lead to major revelations here – *if* the monuments *and* their precious setting are not wrecked.

The existence of Bronze Age settlement remains in this western area has been established for some time, and their survival, character, extent and date will be better understood as the result of forthcoming field evaluations for the road scheme. Only part of this settlement is statutorily protected as a scheduled ancient monument but we consider those parts of it which are not scheduled to be of equal value. In addition to settlement remains, there are important prehistoric features that formed Bronze Age field boundaries. All these features are integral to understanding later stages of the construction and subsequent use of Stonehenge.

Previous archaeological research reveals this area to have some of the highest densities of archaeological finds in the whole of the WHS, with finds from particularly the Neolithic and Bronze Age. Even if archaeological excavations were to be conducted to the highest standards along this c.40m-wide, c. 1.2km-long cut (which we hope that they would), this represents an unacceptable loss of nearly 5ha of prehistoric remains, the greatest single loss of area to any modern development within the WHS.

The approach cutting to a western portal here – deep and wide – will inflict a vast gash on the landscape. With the western portal here, this new gash is not in a peripheral or archaeology-free zone, but in one which is, in a different way, as genuinely unique, just as the famous stones are at Stonehenge itself.

Q6. Please provide us with any comments you may have on our proposals for the western entrance to the tunnel.

As covered by the answer to Q5, the western entrance should be positioned at least 1.2km further west so as not to cause an unacceptable loss of nearly 5ha of prehistoric remains.

The portal and approach road will also be a visual blemish when seen from round barrows right along the flanks of Wilsford Down valley and including parts of the Lake and Winterbourne Stoke groups.

Q7. Do you have any other comments about our proposals for the central section of the scheme within the World Heritage Site?

At its eastern end, construction of the tunnel portal here may have an effect on groundwater conditions which could detrimentally impact the survival of nationally important Mesolithic remains at and around Blick Mead on both sides of the carriageway. This archaeological site

has the longest dated sequence for a settlement of Mesolithic date (the era well before the time of Stonehenge) yet found in Britain, its dates spanning the 8th–5th millennia BC. This long-term use of the area by Mesolithic hunters may explain why the Stonehenge area became a significant focus for the Neolithic people who built Stonehenge just over the ridge from Blick Mead. The site has produced well-preserved organic remains of beetles, pollen, fungal spores and ancient DNA that can shed light on the Mesolithic palaeoenvironment in a way that is exceptional in the UK. This strengthens the case for maintaining this resource in the long-term.

Before any decision can be made about construction within this part of the proposal, there is a requirement to monitor variations in the water table in the immediate vicinity of the site over at least twelve months duration to cover seasonal variations. After that, the Highways Agency and its Scientific Committee would need to be satisfied that the construction methods used on the road sector past Blick Mead would have no deleterious impact on archaeological remains. This would include modelling and further field testing to ensure that archaeological deposits would not suffer from compression beneath any works or from dewatering or oxidation as a result of piling or other ground works. The full extent of these archaeological deposits still need be established on both sides of the existing carriageway.

There are also important archaeological remains within the vicinity of the eastern tunnel portal – deposits currently being evaluated have produced fragments of two Neolithic axes, suggesting that this is part of a dense distribution of prehistoric activity extending along the east side of King Barrow Ridge.

The proposed eastern portal will badly damage the visual setting of the prehistoric hill-fort of Vespasian's Camp and affect its extra-mural archaeological deposits, including remains of a likely palisade extending northwards from the hill-fort's entrance. Any works here will impinge on this and any other features immediately outside the hill-fort's entrance, its natural access point.

THE EASTERN SECTION: Countess junction to just beyond the Solstice Park junction

Q8: Please provide us with any comments you may have on our proposals for the A303 flyover at Countess roundabout.

As noted in the answer to Q.7, the impact of the scheme on preserved Mesolithic deposits in this area has yet to be established.

Q9: Do you have any other comments about our proposals for the eastern section of the scheme (Countess junction to just beyond the Solstice Park junction)?

PART 3: The environmental effects of the scheme

Q10: Do you have any comments on the preliminary environmental information provided for the scheme?

PART 4: Additional comments

Q11: Do you have any other comments you would like to make about the scheme?

1) *Radical and continuing changes in our understanding of Stonehenge, its landscape and archaeology*

Archaeology, like so many scientific studies, is radically changing in its methods. New technologies, such as the 3-dimensional radar method of «LIDAR», have transformed our ability to detect traces too faint for the naked eye. Old techniques of excavation and field survey have been transformed by hi-tech innovations. So our knowledge of the Stonehenge landscape has been radically changed in the last 20 years: too many new and astonishing finds to state here, they fill many recent books. The extraordinary and unique Blick Mead site (above) is a new find, and so are astonishing new aspects to Durrington Walls, a long-known site within the WHS that continues to yield new information about the Neolithic people of Stonehenge. We can anticipate that these new discoveries will continue to be made. It is dangerous to plan on the basis that what we know now of the ancient landscape is all that exists in the ancient landscape.

2) *The short term and the very long term in planning the future of Stonehenge*

The standing stones and structures – the famous part of Stonehenge – are well over 4,000 years old. Other parts, less obvious to the untrained eye, are many centuries older. Other monuments in the WHS landscape are yet older still, by many more centuries. The Blick Mead Mesolithic site is twice as old as the stones at Stonehenge! Where planning normally deals with the short term, of decades extending perhaps into a century or so going forward, and often must notice the medium-term

surviving traces such as 18th- or 19th-century or even medieval buildings, planning in the Stonehenge landscape must deal with a long term, indeed a very long term of several thousands of years.

It follows that *planning at Stonehenge must be cautious and always propose minimal intervention*. There is no area in the WHS where we can say, 'We know that it is *safe* to place a tunnel portal or major new surface road *here* because there is *nothing there which is important* now or *will be seen as important* in the future.' Therefore the whole tunnel option is misconceived.

3) A history of soon-regretted, short-term errors in caring for the Stonehenge landscape

In the century since Stonehenge came into public ownership at the end of the First World War, there have been several big buildings put into its landscape. Each was seen as sensible at the time. Yet within as short a time as a *decade* (!) each was seen as a mistake, so grave a mistake it was not just regretted but demolished. So each modern structure has now disappeared from visible view. Yet the scars left, irretrievably wrecking the archaeology, will never be repaired. Here are three of them.

- Immediately after the then Ministry of Works began to care for Stonehenge, it was obvious that houses for its custodial staff should be built nearby, so the stones would always have guardians close by: within 15 years, the houses were demolished as a hideous and wrong intrusion.
- At much the same time, it was obvious that visitors needed refreshment and facilities, so a Stonehenge Café was built close by: again, within 15 years, the café was demolished as a hideous and wrong intrusion.
- In the 1960s, it was obvious that the car-park was too small, the working buildings for custodians too small and the refreshment facilities were poor.

And it was dangerous for visitors to walk across the fast and busy A344 road to reach the stones. So in 1969/70 a large car-park, semi-underground buildings, and access tunnel under the A344 were built. This was uncontroversial, an obvious improvement. Yet, within 15 years, the head of English Heritage declared their abolition to be its highest priority, and MPs called these facilities a 'national disgrace' which must be removed. Now they have been, leaving a wrecked area so close to Stonehenge covering several hectares.

4) The integrity of the Stonehenge World Heritage Site

Until a century ago, it was only the stones themselves which were seen to constitute precious prehistoric Stonehenge. First World War photographs show artillery field guns being hauled through the very monument – 'safe' as long as they did not hit the actual stones. Increasingly, we have come to understand that Stonehenge is not only the stones, not only the eroded earthworks immediately near the stones, but a whole landscape extending to the horizon in most directions and even beyond. This fact was recognized when the WHS was defined as an area extending several kilometres from Stonehenge in each direction.

The integrity of the WHS was respected when new visitor provision was designed in the 2000s. Sites for a visitor centre were not sought within the WHS: the visitor centre must be on its margin, and was so built. Further access paths and roads to and from Stonehenge must not cross the WHS and interfere with its archaeology: so a scheme was devised which uses the former A344 line for access, a choice which has meant nil new impact within the WHS.

The proposal is a sad and retrograde step. Instead of respecting the WHS as defining the area to be protected, it recognizes only the land which is visible from the stones themselves – a throwback to the limited ideas of 1916! It seeks to protect archaeological remains along the 2.9 km across the WHS which lies above the line of the tunnel, but cheerfully destroys everything within (and, in places, beside) the

road's footprint along a length of over 2 km - nearly as long - of the WHS. And it inflicts within the WHS two enormous and deep approach cuttings to the tunnel portals.

5) Standards in heritage protection: the UK's deserved high reputation

The UK has an international reputation for the quality of its heritage protection and enhancement; that reputation can only be maintained - setting the bar high enough to encourage others to reject large-scale damaging developments in other WHS sites around the world - if the length of the proposed tunnel is more appropriate to the 5km-width of the WHS which the road line will traverse, or if the southern surface route is chosen.