Archdruid leads tunnel protest amidst uncertainty

Over a thousand Druids, visitors and tourists, celebrating the Spring Equinox were led outside the Henge monument by Archdruid Rollo Maughfling, to form a circle of solidarity to protest peacefully but noisily against a tunnel inserted within what the Druids consider to be their sacred space.

The Archdruid said "We do not wish a tunnel coming up in the midst of the environment at the bottom of the line of Stonehenge mid-winter sunset."

The Druids' protest comes after a veritable storm of objections to Highways England's consultation on their Stonehenge A303 road proposals that threaten the prehistoric landscape. [1] Notable objectors include:

- a consortium of 21 highly experienced Stonehenge experts led by Professor Mike Parker Pearson;
- a video statement by archaeologist Dr Julian Richards with over 30 years' work invested in Stonehenge;
- UNESCO's local advisors, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS-UK);
- a statement by former Time Team presenter Tony Robinson;
- The Council for British Archaeology;
- Wiltshire Museum; and
- many other concerned organisations, including ourselves.

We can only guess how many objected directly to Highways England but around 7,000 from the UK and abroad used a proforma letter via our website or that of Friends of the Earth.

Pressure has now come from Government's own spending watchdog,

the National Audit Office. The NAO has revealed that Highways England are struggling to find specialists to cope with their workload. It has identified 16 unnamed schemes that are at risk for not being value for money. Rumour indicates that the A303 at Stonehenge might be on the list to be put on hold or scrapped.

The Stonehenge scheme is an obvious candidate. It has a negative Benefit to Cost Ratio and scrapping it would save a cool £1.4 billion and put an end to mounting criticism and unpopularity.

The NAO blames some of the problems on the Department for Transport who were under party political electoral pressure to hurriedly announce a major roads programme. The DfT failed to select projects for best value and commissioned an unrealistic slew of schemes.





Left: Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg announces that ‘the money is not only there but we are going to legislate on it.” Salisbury Journal

Right: Prime Minister David Cameron at Stonehenge to welcome the £15bn investment in Britain's roads. Daily Mail on 1 December 2014

The timing drew a sharp rebuke from historian Tom Holland when the road scheme was announced in December 2014:

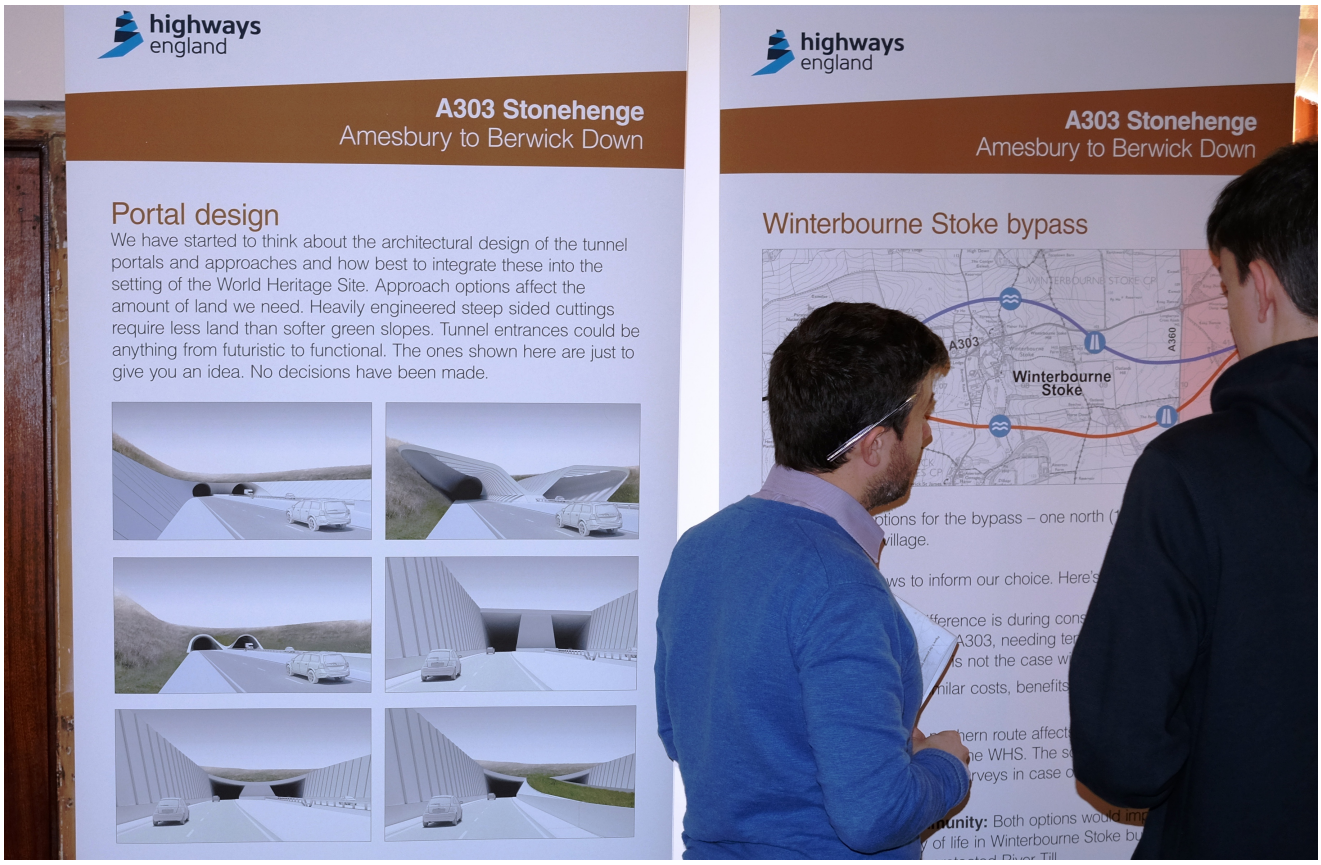
> *"Britain's most celebrated archaeological site should not be offered up as a sacrifice on the altar of electioneering".*

We would add that this scheme is being driven by an old fashioned dogma that says that road widening is the answer to congestion. It isn't. Let's hope the NAO agrees.

_____

[1] Highways England's 7 week consultation closed on 5th March. Documents can be found here.

Stonehenge Alliance responds and calls for a re-run



The Alliance's response to Highways England's proposals for the A303 Stonehenge scheme can be seen here.

Position of other organisations can be found here.

Our submission to Highways England does not conform to the proforma and is lengthy, owing to the specialist input from the different Alliance supporter organisations. We object strongly to the short tunnel scheme and address archaeological, natural environment, landscape and transport considerations. We highlight the incompatibility of the short tunnel project with Government's commitment to the World Heritage Convention, its own planning guidance and policies, and the widely agreed Word Heritage Site Management Plan 2015. We note a number of statements in the Technical Appraisal

Report that indicate the scheme cannot be considered ‘value for money’.

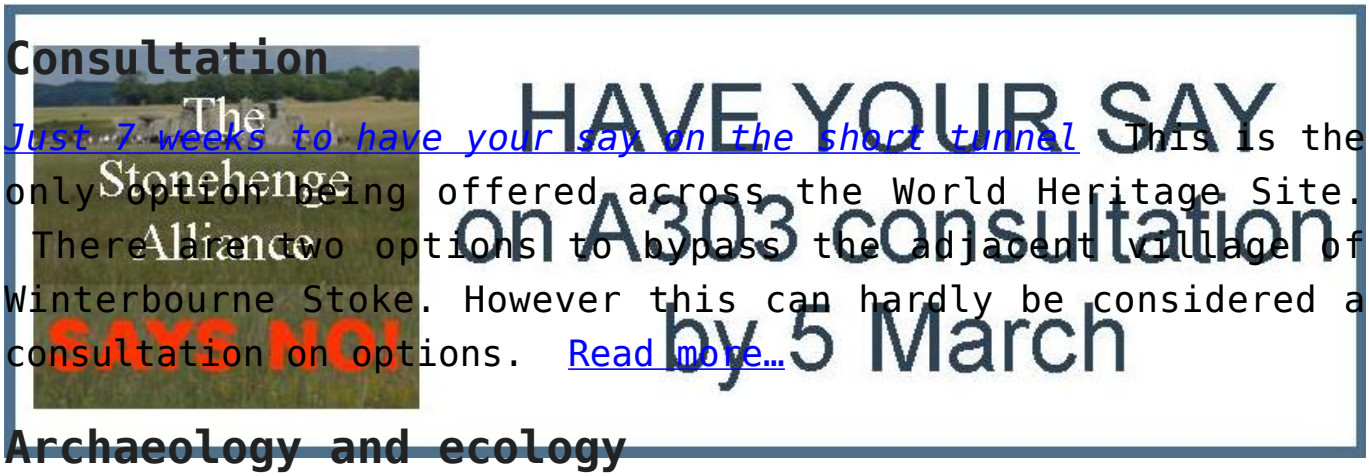
We explain why we consider the consultation process to be seriously flawed and ask for it to be re-run with adequate information provided with a sensible choice of options.

A303 Consultation: Key points

We urge everyone to participate in the public consultation about the proposed changes to the A303 at Stonehenge. To help inform your response we have written a series of three reactions with some links below.

Our key concerns are:

- Consultation period is too short for a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- No options offered to protect the World Heritage Site
- Tunnel too short (WHS is 5.4km/3.4miles wide, tunnel is 2.9km/1.8 miles long).
- Serious damage to archaeology and landscape in direct contravention of planning policy and World Heritage Convention.
- Detrimental to wildlife especially the RSPB reserve for Stone Curlews.
- £1.4bn expenditure won't solve traffic problems.



Consultation

Just 7 weeks to have your say on the short tunnel This is the only option being offered across the World Heritage Site. There are two options to bypass the adjacent village of Winterbourne Stoke. However this can hardly be considered a consultation on options. Read more…

Archaeology and ecology

A303 tunnel impacts on archaeology and ecology The plans for the A303 are of particular concern for the damage they would do to archaeology, wildlife and the WHS landscape. Read more…

Transport and planning

A303 Short tunnel: Transport and planning considerations The A303 widening is a road scheme that fails to respect the special requirements of a WHS. Read more…

What can you do to help?

1. **Please respond to the A303 Stonehenge consultation here** by 5 March 2017. For further information, maps and documentation see Highways England's consultation page here.

2. **If you haven't already done so, please, sign our petition** and encourage your friends to do the same.

> ***KINDLY NOTE:*** *Since setting up the petition, we have learned more about the recently discovered Mesolithic site at Blick Mead. This has led us to consider that if Government insists on a tunnel under the WHS, it must be long enough to avoid the WHS and its setting altogether. This would be in line with planning policy and World Heritage Convention safeguards. We cannot change the wording but our intention to avoid further damage is clearly stated in the petition.*

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WRITE TO HIGHWAYS ENGLAND

A303 Short tunnel: Transport and planning considerations



Third of three reactions to Highways England proposals for a short tunnel

Reaction #3: Transport and planning

Transport



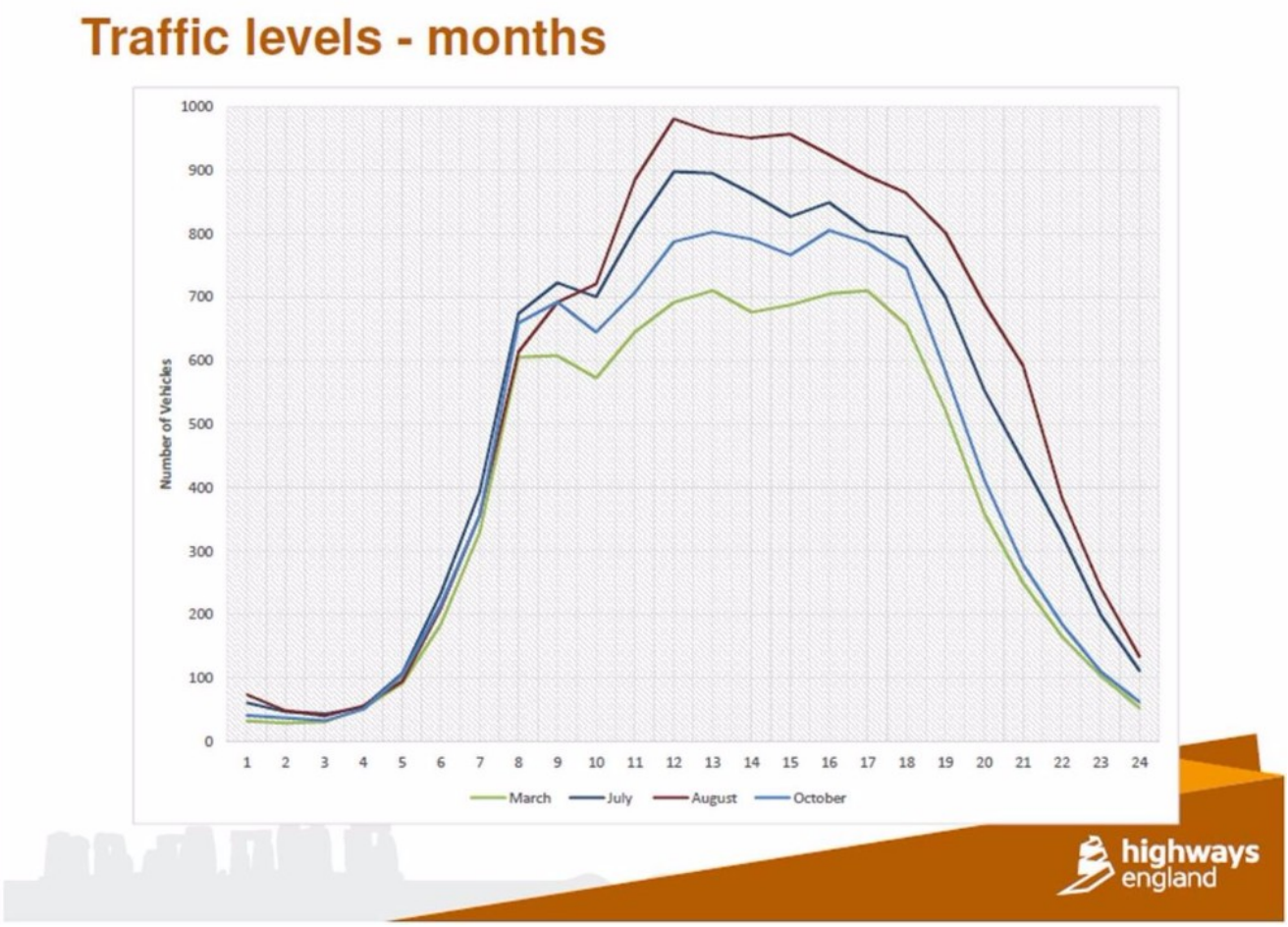
Busy traffic on the A303 is seasonal and cuts across the

Stonehenge World Heritage Site. Copyright: Stonehenge Alliance

The A303 widening is a road scheme that fails to respect the special requirements of a WHS, owing to Government demands for affordability, achievability and value for money. An enormous amount of money (some £1.4bn) is to be spent on the road 'improvement', most of it on the tunnel.

The Government's aim is to improve journey times to the South West to stimulate economic and housing growth. It is generally accepted, however, that increasing road capacity encourages more traffic. Highways England in 2014 expected the increase to be at least 20% for the A303 scheme. Traffic congestion could return in a few years.

A303 widening and induced traffic would have as yet unknown impacts on the wider road network. Integrated transport for most people is either diminishing or non-existent whilst peak time congestion in local towns and cities is far worse than at Stonehenge, where queues occur mainly at weekends and holiday times, typically in July and August on a Friday between 11am and 6pm. The figure below shows typical seasonal and hourly intermittent pattern.



Highways England graph showing typical traffic levels by month and hour of day.

The local problems of rat-running through villages could be tackled now and smart measures to discourage drivers from using the A303 at busy times could also be introduced before irreversible steps are taken to spend a fortune on irreparably damaging a WHS for seasonal and intermittent traffic problems.

Planning policy considerations

The WHS was designated by UNESCO as being of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) for its archaeological remains of the Neolithic and Bronze Ages. A Statement of OUV for the WHS can be seen here. There is a raft of protective planning policy for the WHS within Government and local planning policy; for example, Wiltshire Core Strategy, Policy C59 states:

> ***Wiltshire Core Policy 59***

The Stonehenge, Avebury and associated sites World Heritage Site

"The Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the World Heritage Site will be sustained by:

1. *Giving precedence to the protection of the World Heritage Site and its setting*
2. *Development not adversely affecting the World Heritage Site and its attributes of OUV. This includes the physical fabric, character, appearance, setting or views into or out of the World Heritage Site*
3. *Seeking opportunities to support and maintain the positive management of the World Heritage Site through development that delivers improved conservation, presentation and interpretation and reduces the negative impacts of roads,traffic and visitor pressure*
4. *Requiring developments to demonstrate that full account has been taken of their impact upon the World Heritage Site and its setting. Proposals will need to demonstrate that the development will have no individual, cumulative or consequential adverse effect upon the site and its OUV. Consideration of opportunities for enhancing the World Heritage Site and sustaining its OUV should also be demonstrated. This will include proposals for climate change mitigation and renewable energy schemes."*

The widely agreed WHS Management Plan is a material consideration, its 'vision', below, expressing the intention to safeguard the whole WHS and its setting.

Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site Management Plan: Vision

"The Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site is

universally important for its unique and dense concentration of outstanding prehistoric monuments and sites which together form a landscape without parallel. We will work together to care for and safeguard this special area and provide a tranquil, rural and ecologically diverse setting for it and its archaeology. This will allow present and future generations to explore and enjoy the monuments and their landscape setting more fully. We will also ensure that the special qualities of the World Heritage Site are presented, interpreted and enhanced where appropriate, so that visitors, the local community and the whole world can better understand and value the extraordinary achievements of the prehistoric people who left us this rich legacy. We will realise the cultural, scientific and educational potential of the World Heritage Site as well as its social and economic benefits for the community."

The World Heritage Convention is also critical. In September 2015, the Government restated it's commitment to Article 4 of the Convention, which reads:

World Heritage Convention: Article 4

" Each State Party to this Convention recognizes that the duty of ensuring the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations of the cultural and natural heritage referred to in Articles 1 and 2 and situated on its territory, belongs primarily to that State. It will do all it can to this end, to the utmost of its own resources and, where appropriate, with any international assistance and co-operation, in particular, financial, artistic, scientific and technical, which it may be able to obtain."

Our Government should respect its own commitments, guidance and policy in dealing with a World Heritage Site, and ensure that both the site and its setting are protected from damaging

road engineering.

What can you do to help?

1. **Please respond to the A303 Stonehenge consultation here** by 5 March 2017. For further information, maps and documentation see Highways England's consultation page here.

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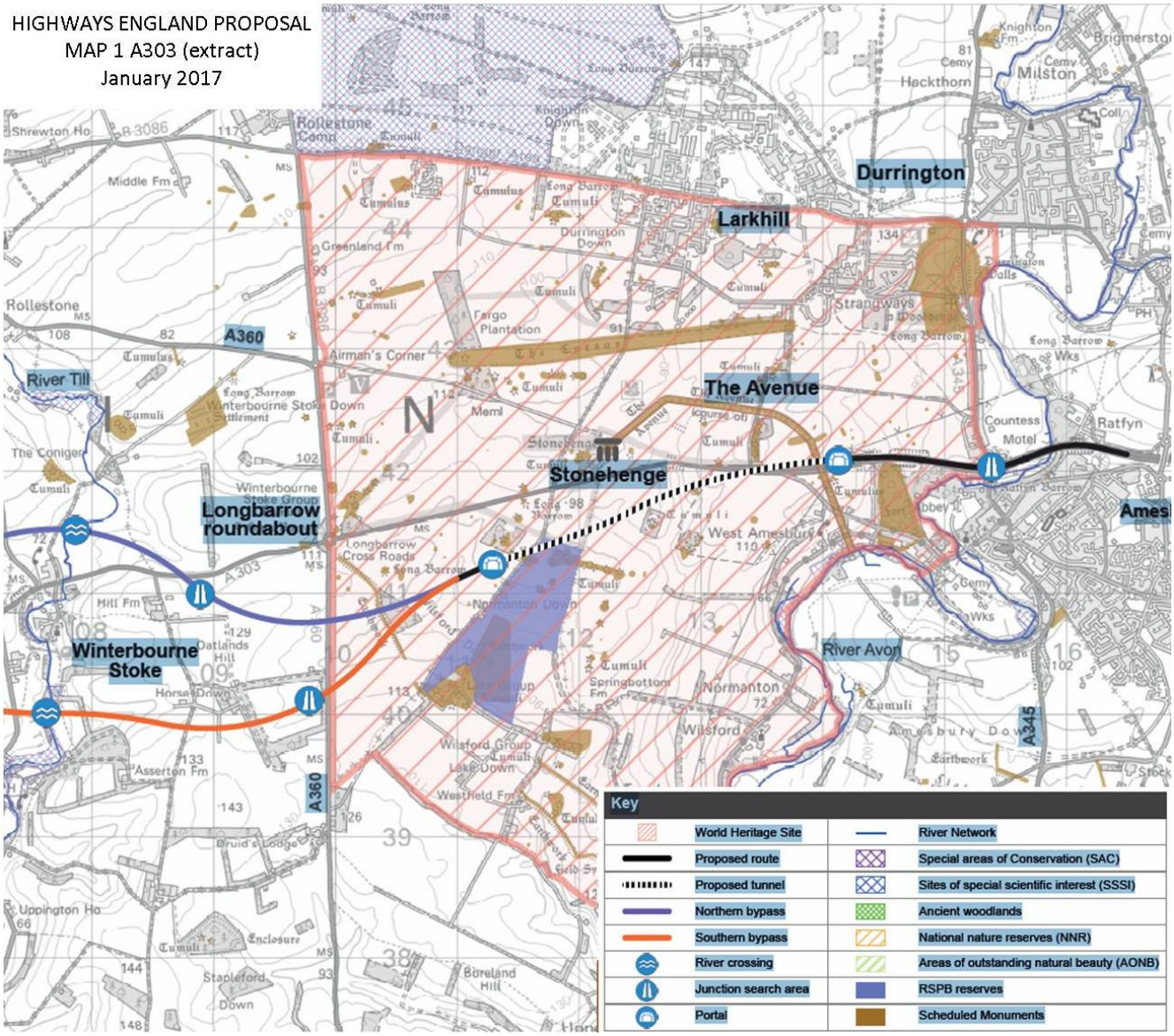
WRITE TO HIGHWAYS ENGLAND

A303 tunnel impacts on archaeology and ecology



Second of three reactions to Highways England proposals for a short tunnel

Reaction #2: impacts on archaeology and ecology



The WHS extends over some 9½ square miles. Extract from Highways England map of proposal January 2017

The plans for the A303 are of particular concern for the damage they would do to archaeology, wildlife and the WHS landscape. The Highways England map links to a large file (71mb)

Archaeology

To the east: Twin tunnel portals would sit just north of the present A303 and within the barrow cemetery east of King Barrow Ridge. Even more critical is the portals' proximity to traces of the ancient Avenue, a major feature of a designed landscape, leading from the Henge to the River Avon. Already

severed by the present A303, the Avenue's integrity and setting would be shockingly degraded close by the tunnel entrances. Engineering works, noise from faster traffic, the flyover at Countess and, possibly, new embankments (ill-defined on the video) could be catastrophic for the Mesolithic site of Blick Mead beside the A303.



The ancient Avenue would cross almost over the east tunnel portal. There would apparently be a raised embankment beside Blick Mead, in woodland south of the A303. Image from Highways England video January 2017. Labels by Stonehenge Alliance

To the west: Tunnel portals would sit just south of Normanton Gorse wood – on the alignment between Stonehenge and the winter solsticial sunset: an extraordinarily inappropriate location in view of the known astronomical associations of Stonehenge. Furthermore, the portals would be cut at the western end of the Normanton Down barrow cemetery, of which Bush Barrow is a part, famous for its gold artefacts. The woodland of Normanton Gorse, like that of The Diamond further

west which would be cut through by the new road, contains important archaeological remains hitherto protected from the plough.

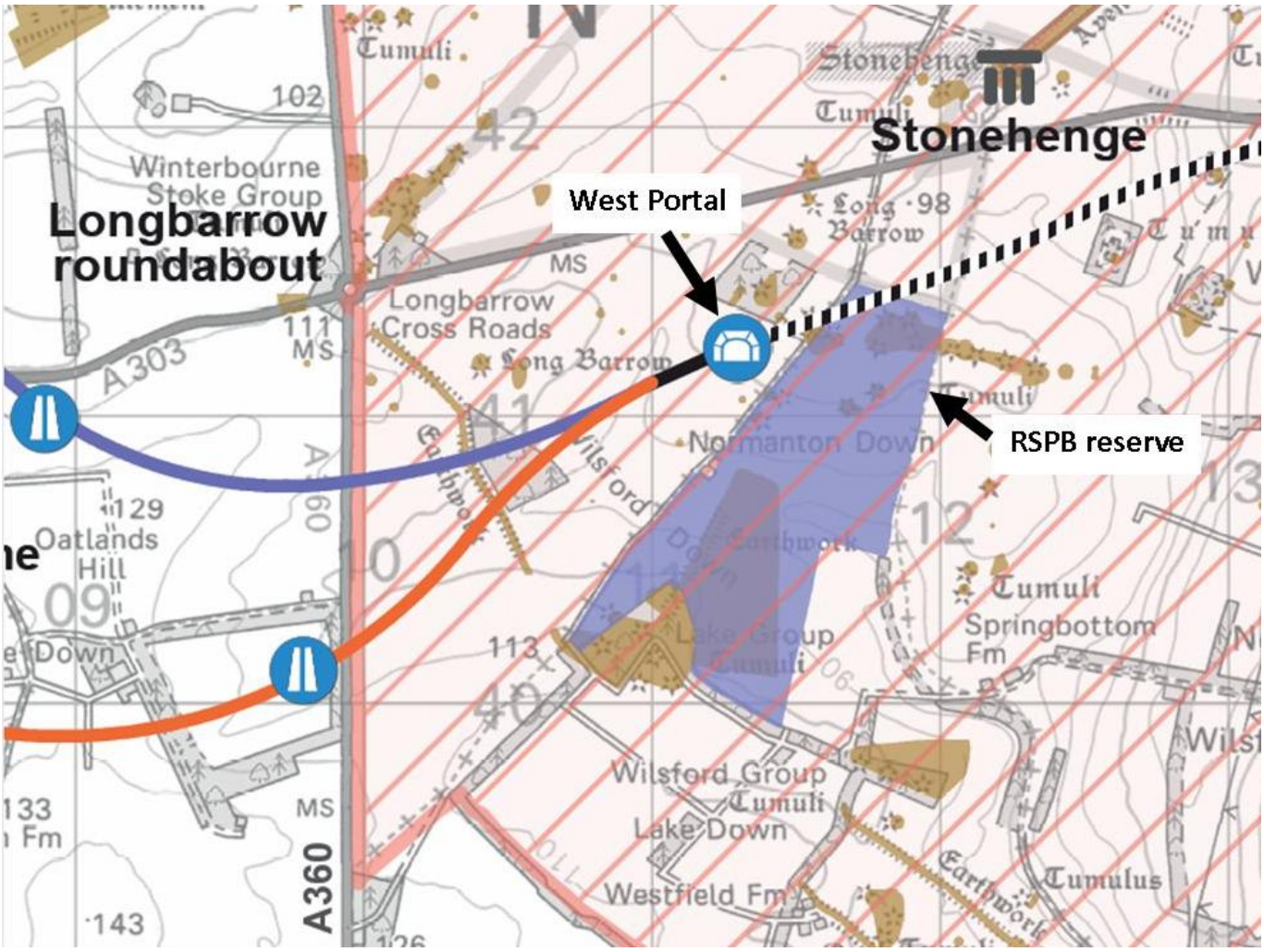


West tunnel portal close to Byway 12 (runs from bottom right to top left). Upstanding Normanton Down barrows lie partly within Normanton Gorse wood and RSPB Stone Curlew Reserve beside Byway 12. Image from Highways England video January 2017. Labels by Stonehenge Alliance

The dualled highway, in a cutting, would emerge from the western portals to cross a tract containing multiple traces of archaeological remains, most significant among them a rare group of seven Neolithic long barrows. These barrows, respected by later Bronze Age cemeteries, were deliberately located around the head of the dry valley through which the new expressway would be gouged – in places close to barrows. The shaping of the landscape and inter-connectivity of the monuments is one of the attributes of the Outstanding Universal Value of the WHS. All archaeology in the path of the

new highway would be removed.

Ecology



The western tunnel portals and highway would certainly impact adversely on the RSPB's Stone Curlew reserve beside Byway 12 (area marked purple). The tranquillity and environment of this important breeding ground would be greatly disturbed, both during construction work (approximately 4 years) and afterwards: so much so, perhaps, that the reserve would no longer be viable.

Little is known about bat roosts and feeding grounds in the woodlands affected by the engineering works, though protected species are known close to Amesbury. Bats can be disturbed during road construction and by vehicle noise and speed.

The River Avon on the eastern boundary of the WHS and its

tributary the River Till, to the west of the WHS, are legally protected as Special Areas of Conservation for aquatic plants and snails. There must be concerns about their safeguarding from the impacts of major engineering works and the effects of vehicle pollution in the longer term.

Other impacts

Not seen on the maps, visuals and elegant videos are details such as lighting, fencing and signage.

Nor do the illustrations reveal how wide the highways, tunnel approaches and portals would be. Even in road cuttings, vehicle headlights, noise and fumes would be intrusive and pollutiing, particularly unwelcome in the western part of the WHS which at present is both tranquil and beautiful along Byway 12.

Drainage treatment areas and construction compounds are not shown. Images of road building at Hindhead and Newbury give some idea of the devastation involved during road construction activity.

Implementation of a tunnel scheme at Stonehenge and loss of the drivers' view also has, of course, implications for Avebury – part of the same WHS – which might well suffer from increased tourism and traffic and the potential loss of World Heritage status.

What can you do to help?

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