A303 and Stonehenge: The latest position

George McDonic, Stonehenge Alliance Chairman, writes about the current situation concerning the A303 and Stonehenge



George McDonic MBE, BL, DIPLTP, FRTPI, DPA, FFB,
Chairman, Stonehenge Alliance

It is enormously encouraging to know that over 18,000 concerned individuals have signed the Stonehenge Alliance's UK and global petitions demanding that there should be no further damage to the World Heritage Site (WHS) since the Government's December 2014 announcement of a 2.9km bored tunnel for the A303 at Stonehenge. The volume of support for its safeguarding is a strong measure of the value people from all over the world place on the heritage at Stonehenge; and reflects recognition of the 'Outstanding Universal Value' placed upon it by UNESCO in its WHS designation, together with Avebury, in 1986.

In recent months we have learned of the concern expressed to Government ministers by the UK branch of the International

Council on Monuments and Sites and that an advisory mission of UNESCO's World Heritage Committee will be visiting Stonehenge later this year.

We understand that the Government is now considering a bored tunnel of 'at least' 2.9km in length: we have asked if additional funding would be available for a longer tunnel, since the sum earmarked is for a 2.9km tunnel, and have not yet had a reply.

Consultation on Highways England's options for the A303 at Stonehenge is still awaited. Any tunnel engineering in the area will need to take the hydrogeological problems into account and it is therefore difficult to be certain about the feasibility of any length of tunnel at the present time. We continue to say, however, that if Government considers that road tunnelling is essential it should, at the very least, involve no further damage to the WHS, bearing in mind that a bored tunnel would probably require some tens of metres of cut-and-cover engineering at the portals. Our reasons for this are twofold.

First, our continuing gains in knowledge about the archaeology of WHS, as evidenced by the new findings of the Stonehenge Hidden Landscapes Project and, close to Amesbury, at the Mesolithic site of Blick Mead, are a strong indication of what is still to be learned about the Stonehenge landscape. Modern development is continually nibbling away at the edges of this finite resource, sometimes involving the removal of archaeological remains, sometimes intruding upon the landscape settings of upstanding monuments and their ancient interrelationships. Such damage, even if on a minor scale, will lead to a cumulative loss of knowledge and understanding.

Second – and directly related to my first point– is that severe damage to the WHS resulting from a short road tunnel would be contrary not only to the Government's duty under the World Heritage Convention but also to local planning policy

and the widely agreed aims of the newly published WHS Management Plan.

The planning safeguards are there to ensure protection of the WHS for future generations and evaluation criteria must be employed for this exceptional place that are not simply limited to current Government demands for affordability and value for money.

I urge you to continue supporting our petition until we are confident that the Stonehenge World Heritage Site and its setting are safeguarded for all time.

George McDonic, 22 August 2015

[You can sign our petition here.]

Enthusiasm for short bored tunnel undimmed



Whilst Government's enthusiasm for a short bored tunnel remains undimmed, enthusiasm for our campaign to save our most significant neolithic landscape continues to grow. Below is our recent letter to our petitioners, which we wish to share more widely.

Dear Supporter,

A huge thank you to everyone who has signed our petition to support our campaign. We now have over 17,000 signatures (*as at the end of July*), which has already led to some success: prompted by our campaign, UNESCO stated publicly that it is monitoring the road scheme very closely. But UNESCO's concerns need to be backed up by an even greater groundswell of objections.

Since setting up our petition we would like to share two important developments.

First, the new Government's resolve to proceed with the A303 Expressway past Stonehenge and its 2.9km tunnel with portals inserted in the World Heritage Site remains undimmed. This is despite massive cuts to other public services. We have been told by the Secretary of State, John Whittingdale, that 2.9km is to be considered its minimum length. However no increase to the budget to pay for a longer tunnel was announced this month.

Second is the exciting discovery of a Mesolithic Site on the eastern edge of the World Heritage Site. It predates Stonehenge by thousands of years and any road engineering nearby would threaten its highly sensitive archaeology. This extraordinary discovery, as well as the findings of other archaeological projects in the Stonehenge landscape, highlight the absolute necessity for a solution that avoids the whole World Heritage Site.

So we are emailing you to go one step further. Please can you recruit friends, family and colleagues to sign our petition https://you.38degrees.org.uk/…/save-stonehenge-world-herita…?

And if you can spare the time, please can you write to UNESCO and the National Trust via our website http://stonehengealliance.org.uk/act-now/?

Thanks again for getting behind this campaign. Please carry on

spreading the word about Stonehenge world Heritage Site under threat.

With best wishes,
The Stonehenge Alliance

Share our posts on Facebook
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Follow us on Twitter
Link to petition for those with non-UK address

A303 widening threatens hidden Stonehenge archaeology



Watch this video as a fascinating landscape of monuments is revealed beneath one of the world's most famous heritage sites, Stonehenge.

Stonehenge Hidden Landscapes Project is at the Royal Society's Summer Exhibition
30 June to 5 July 2015

Stonehenge Underground is a week-long public exhibition of the Stonehenge Hidden Landscapes Project at the Royal Society's Summer Science Exhibition, which opens tomorrow for one week only. The Project is a collaboration of European

archaeologists using a range of non-invasive scientific surveying techniques, which has revealed an astonishing number of hitherto unknown sites in the landscape surrounding Stonehenge.

A resumé of the exhibition and a critically important video of the Project's investigations around Stonehenge can be viewed here.

The work of the Project continues: the thousands of sites identified and mapped need to be verified and analysed in order to understand what they represent and how they may fit within the chronological – and especially the prehistoric – record of land use and occupation in the World Heritage Site (WHS).

In view of the threat of road widening proposals at the Stonehenge World Heritage Site, the importance of the Stonehenge Hidden Landscapes Project cannot be overstated. Its results so far and the potential for future findings provide clear and timely demonstration of the archaeological sensitivity of the WHS and of how much more there is still to be learned about the surroundings of the World's most famous monument.

We trust that Government Ministers will visit the Royal Society's exhibition and discover just how damaging the proposed A303 short tunnel would be, not only to the landscape and tranquillity of the WHS but also in terms of the permanent destruction of new and unknown archaeological evidence. Most of the discoveries are invisible to the naked eye, and many are part of the story of those who built Stonehenge and the remarkable complex of upstanding monuments that we can see within the WHS today.

After millennia of relative ignorance about this extraordinary landscape, now is clearly not the time to carve it up with road engineering works. Let us hope that the work of the

Stonehenge Hidden Landscapes Project will persuade the Government to protect the WHS from the threat of irreversible damage by road widening.

TAKE ACTION!
If you are concerned about the threat to the Stonehenge landscape from road widening of the A303 please sign our petition here.

Batting with a purpose "Don't Stump Stonehenge"



Tom Holland hopes to bowl out the tunnel through Stonehenge World Heritage Site

It took the London Evening Standard to spot the AuthorsCC v AveburyCC playing a megalithic protest cricket match in the shadow of Wiltshire's famous stone circle to spread an unequivocal message: #DontStumpStonehenge. The mid-summer's day entry is reproduced with permission from the Londoner's Diary:

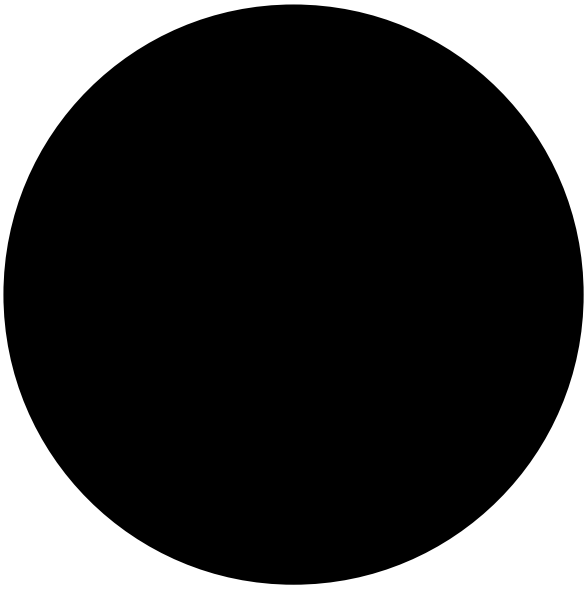
Batting on with the druids

Plans to tunnel under Stonehenge are simply not cricket, says Tom Holland. He and fellow members of the Authors' Cricket Club including William Fiennes, Anthony McGowan and captain Charlie Campbell, took their bats to Stonehenge this weekend for a protest match, #DontStumpStonehenge, against AveburyCC.

It "could not have been more megalithically mid-summer", Holland enthuses. "We were playing in the shadow of the neolithic earthworks that surround the stone circle and druids kept wandering by. Novelist Richard Beard scored a century & I, ahem ahem, demolished the stumps of their two openers".

Sadly, without our chum Sebastian Faulks on the field – Holland "suspect[s] the druids had nobbled him" – the scribblers lost in the penultimate over by five wickets.

Fortunately Alliance members took an interpreter to explain what a wicket is: "It's somewhat shorter than a trilithon but with a third upright in the middle."



Authors' CC fielding in the shadow of Avebury's neolithic earthworks on mid-summer's day

#DontStumpStonehenge: Take action!

Stonehenge & Avebury are inscribed together as a World Heritage Site.

The real challenge – spending wisely



Stephen Joseph

by Stephen Joseph OBE, Chief Executive Officer, Campaign for Better Transport.

The unexpected election result gives the appearance of continuity in transport: Patrick McLoughlin has been reappointed as Transport Secretary, and two junior Ministers return to their pre-election posts.

The team of Ministers do however face a bundle of challenges. The ones the media have highlighted are on big projects: aviation and High Speed 2. Yet the real transport challenges the new Government faces are much broader than these.

Government needs to take urgent action on air pollution. The Supreme Court requires the Government to draw up a robust air quality strategy by the end of the year. Of similar urgency is the full contribution from the transport sector to reducing carbon emissions as part of the UN climate negotiations in Paris this December. The Government is already supporting a transition to low carbon vehicles which is welcomed, but needs to go much further.

Improving air quality and reducing carbon emissions strengthen the case for investment in cycling, walking and upgrading public transport, which in turn support the reappraisal of new road-building and aviation infrastructure policies. The commitment to freezing rail fares in real terms is a welcome first step, but the continued loss of local bus services is worrying and needs to be addressed.

Then there’s the Road Investment Strategy. We will continue to challenge this, especially schemes such as Stonehenge where there is a poor transport case for dualling the A303, where alternatives have not been properly considered. While a short tunnel has been promoted to avoid the Stone monument itself, the remaining road building proposed within the World Heritage Site would cause immense harm. Whichever way you look at it, £2bn for expanding the A303 is significant and offers poor value for money in terms of transport and access that this could deliver. Even from the motorists’ view point, when there is already a £12bn backlog of local road maintenance, spending money on major trunk roads looks imbalanced.

The Department for Transport with its ‘unprotected’ budget will face huge pressures to cut funding. The risk is that the transport programmes that best address air pollution and

climate change and make the most difference to most people (buses, local transport, cycling and walking), will perversely be the very ones in the firing line.

The Conservative party fought the election committed to supporting investment in transport and on a record of economic competence. The forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review will be this Government's opportunity to demonstrate that it is capable of looking at the bigger picture, focus on smarter transport spending and be prepared to review damaging new roads in particular. However, if the Government insists on schemes such as the A303 going ahead, then it needs to do the job properly and invest in a scheme that fully protects and enhances the whole of the World Heritage Site and not just part of it, as it is required to do under the World Heritage Convention.