

Cancellation of Stonehenge road welcomed!

Stonehenge Alliance Press Release



The Stonehenge Alliance [1] has welcomed today's announcement by Chancellor Rachel Reeves to cancel the £2.5bn A303 Stonehenge scheme [2] as a "low value, unaffordable commitment" [3].

The Stonehenge Alliance believe the road should have been binned in 2020 when it was recommended for refusal, after a six month examination, for the damage it would cause to the World Heritage Site [4]. However, the previous government's obsession with road building resulted in it approving the scheme despite acknowledging that it would cause permanent and irreversible harm to the World Heritage Site. It was also grotesquely expensive, but even based on National Highways' own figures the economic case for building was fatally flawed. The road scheme would have been lucky to create 50 pence in

economic benefits for every £1 spent [5].

John Adams, chair of the Stonehenge Alliance said:

“This is a vindication of all the work of so many people over so many years from supporters around the world. National Highways’ misguided project was called out for what it was: low value and unaffordable. It was also highly damaging. Now that it has been scrapped, we need to move on. As soon as the budget is there, we need to ensure, as a priority, that local traffic is better managed and rail access to the South West improved.”

Tom Holland, historian and president of the Stonehenge Alliance, said:

“This is wonderful news. This entire monstrous project, a proposal to drive a gash of concrete & tarmac through our most sacred prehistoric landscape, should never have got off the drawing board. That cancelling it will also save £2.5 bn is obviously an additional perk.”

– ENDS –

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Notes to editors:

[1] The [Stonehenge Alliance](#) supporter-organisations are: Ancient Sacred Landscape Network; Campaign to Protect Rural England; Friends of the Earth; Rescue, the British Archaeological Trust; and Transport Action Network.

[2] The £1.7bn is from around 2017 and is clearly out of date as can be seen by this [answer to Danny Kruger MP's Parliamentary question](#) (12 March 2024). This admits that even in 2018, the construction cost was estimated to be £1.9bn with maintenance costs of £8m a year. With construction inflation being so high since then, it is likely that the combined total cost of the scheme is over £2.5bn and that's before it runs into any difficulties tunnelling in phosphatic chalk.

[3] Rachel Reeves [outlined her proposals this afternoon to Parliament](#). When she spoke on transport starting from 15:47, she said Labour would not go ahead with the A303 Stonehenge scheme, but she didn't say cancel. However, in the published [policy paper](#) the scheme is listed as cancelled (section 3.2)

[4] The [Examination Report](#), dated 2 January, 2020 and written by five planning inspectors, who presided over a six month examination, recommended that the application be refused. It was published on 12 November, 2020, when the Secretary of State made his first decision to approve the scheme.

[5] The scheme's economic case depends on National Highways claiming that the scheme would deliver £1bn in heritage benefits. But given the Examination Authority recommended refusal for the 'permanent and irreversible' harm it would cause the World Heritage Site (see [4] below) and the Secretary of State's acceptance that the scheme would have a significant impact, this is no longer credible.

National Highways has also tried to boost its economic case by ignoring costs already spent and increasing benefits without providing any evidence for its claims. Even so, the scheme would only deliver at best 50 pence in benefits for every £1 spent. See page 4 onwards of [Stonehenge Alliance's rebuttal](#) of National Highways change to its economic assessment.

UNESCO raises the stakes over Stonehenge

Stonehenge Alliance Press statement: Tuesday, 25 June, 2024



The World Heritage Committee repeatedly requested that the cuttings be removed from within the inscribed property because they would have major negative impact on the overall prehistoric landscape, and compromise the physical intactness of the “highly significant ancient cultural landscape.”

Photo © [Stonehenge Drones](#)

The Stonehenge Alliance (SA) [1] welcomes UNESCO’s recommendation that the Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage

Site be placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger due to the threat from the A303 road scheme. The recommendation is contained in a report to UNESCO's World Heritage Committee that will be meeting in July in India [2].

The report reveals that National Highways and the UK Government have proposed changes to the scheme to try and disguise the deep cutting through the Bronze Age landscape on the western side of the site. These include 'cantilevered sides' and another 'green bridge' adding £50m to the scheme costs [3]. However, these do not appear to have addressed UNESCO's concerns.

Also revealed is the level of frustration with the UK Government's attitude towards its obligations under the World Heritage Convention. Also, with its failure to respect UNESCO's request to pause all work to allow further discussion [4]. This was seen earlier in the year when National Highways pressed ahead with closure of the A360 (to much local concern) to carry out preparatory works for the scheme [4].

All eyes will now be on the incoming (most likely) Labour Government as it will inherit the scheme and will have to decide on its future.

John Adams, chair of the Stonehenge Alliance and one of the 3 directors of SSWHS [5], said:

"This is a damning verdict on National Highways' plans. Its minor tweaks have quite rightly cut no ice with UNESCO. You can put lipstick on a pig, but it is still a pig. Whichever way you look at it, this scheme will be hugely damaging and should be scrapped. The money should be spent instead on improving public transport links to and around the South West. That would be the best way of reducing pressure on the A303, while still retaining the view of the Stones for passing travellers."

Tom Holland, president of the Stonehenge Alliance:

“When in a hole, stop digging – and when the hole is one that has been dug by your political opponents, definitely stop digging. The new Government will have the perfect opportunity to reverse a road scheme that is not only ludicrously expensive, but risks huge damage to the country’s international reputation. We hope that whoever comes to power next week will seize it.”

– ENDS –

Contact us by email [SaveStonehenge \(at\) gmail.com](mailto:SaveStonehenge@gmail.com)

Notes to editors:

[1] The [Stonehenge Alliance](#) supporter-organisations are: Ancient Sacred Landscape Network; Campaign to Protect Rural England; Friends of the Earth; Rescue, the British Archaeological Trust; and Transport Action Network.

[2] UNESCO’s World Heritage Committee is holding its 46th meeting in New Delhi, India, from [21 – 31 July, 2024](#), which will be live streamed.

[3] This additional work would all be permitted within the existing DCO, which further suggests its limited impact, given the UK Government had previously stated that longer tunnels would require a new DCO. UNESCO is of this opinion ([extracts from page 13, item 7B of the provisional agenda](#)):

“The proposals for changes to the consented Scheme put forward by the State Party would have only very modest visual benefits. The two bridges would allow access across the four-lane highway, but would not minimise, or even reduce the impact on archaeological resources or the integrity of the landscape. The current main road through the landscape is undesirable, but the proposed cuttings represent a more

serious and irreversible threat to the OUV of the property. Furthermore, these changes do not comply with the 'minimum' requirements previously determined by the Committee, nor do they align with the recommendations of the 2022 Advisory mission, and they do not offer what was sought in the request for corrective measures set out in Decision 45 COM 7B.62, which provided an explicit indication that:

“the minimum change required must include an extension of the underground section of the western approach (in tunnel and/or cut-and-cover) to at least the western boundary of the property, with the western portal relocated as far west as reasonably practical, thereby reducing the length of the cut-and-cover section and minimising the extent of archaeological resources which must be removed”;”

The report also states:

“Although the State Party considers that the consented Scheme provides ‘best available outcome for the OUV of the property’, that is within the limits that the State Party itself has set for this project.”

[4] UNESCO’s frustration is revealed here (top of page 13, [item 7B of the provisional agenda](#)):

“Moreover, contracts for the construction of the DCO Scheme have been awarded (subject to necessary approvals) and preliminary works are taking place in 2024, with substantial construction to proceed in 2025. While the preliminary works are outside the property and not subject to the DCO, they do not comply with the request of the Committee in Decision 45 COM 7B.62 that ‘all further decisions or actions to implement the Scheme in its current approved state are halted until the Committee has reviewed the comprehensive information package of proposed modifications at its 46th session.’”

[5] [Save Stonehenge World Heritage Site \(SSWHS\)](#) is the organisation set up by the Stonehenge Alliance that has been granted permission to appeal the judgement on the latest Government approval of the A303 Stonehenge Development Consent Order.

Sacrilege! An archaeologist speaks out on centenary of Stonehenge gift



Lady Chubb with her husband Sir Cecil Chubb, donors of Stonehenge to the nation in 1918. [Image source here](#)

Expressway legacy threat mars centenary of Stonehenge donation

Today is the centenary of the gift of Stonehenge to the nation by Sir Cecil and Lady Chubb. This weekend, English Heritage is

marking the occasion with a specially commissioned tea party designed by Jeremy Deller and an installation of his work, "Sacrilege", an almost life-sized inflatable Stonehenge.

A joyous public celebration for some, but for many others it could mark impending sacrilege for the nation's most famous World Heritage Site.

Highways England applied only a week ago to the Planning Inspectorate for a Development Consent Order to build the A303 tunnel and Expressway, disregarding all pleas to afford the World Heritage Site the respect it deserves. Many specialists and thousands of people from around the world loudly condemn the scheme.

A distinguished archaeologist condemns the Stonehenge tunnel

Professor Mike Parker Pearson, leading expert in British Neolithic archaeology, speaks out about the Stonehenge tunnel in a newly released video "**Stonehenge tunnel sets a bad precedent**" to share his profound concerns. At barely 3km long the tunnel would be too short within a World Heritage Site that is more than 5km across, full of prehistoric monuments. Mike reminds us that the UNESCO World Heritage Site is

"a designation of an entire landscape. It's one of the few places, not just in Britain but in the World, where you can see a special, sacred landscape developed over thousands of years."

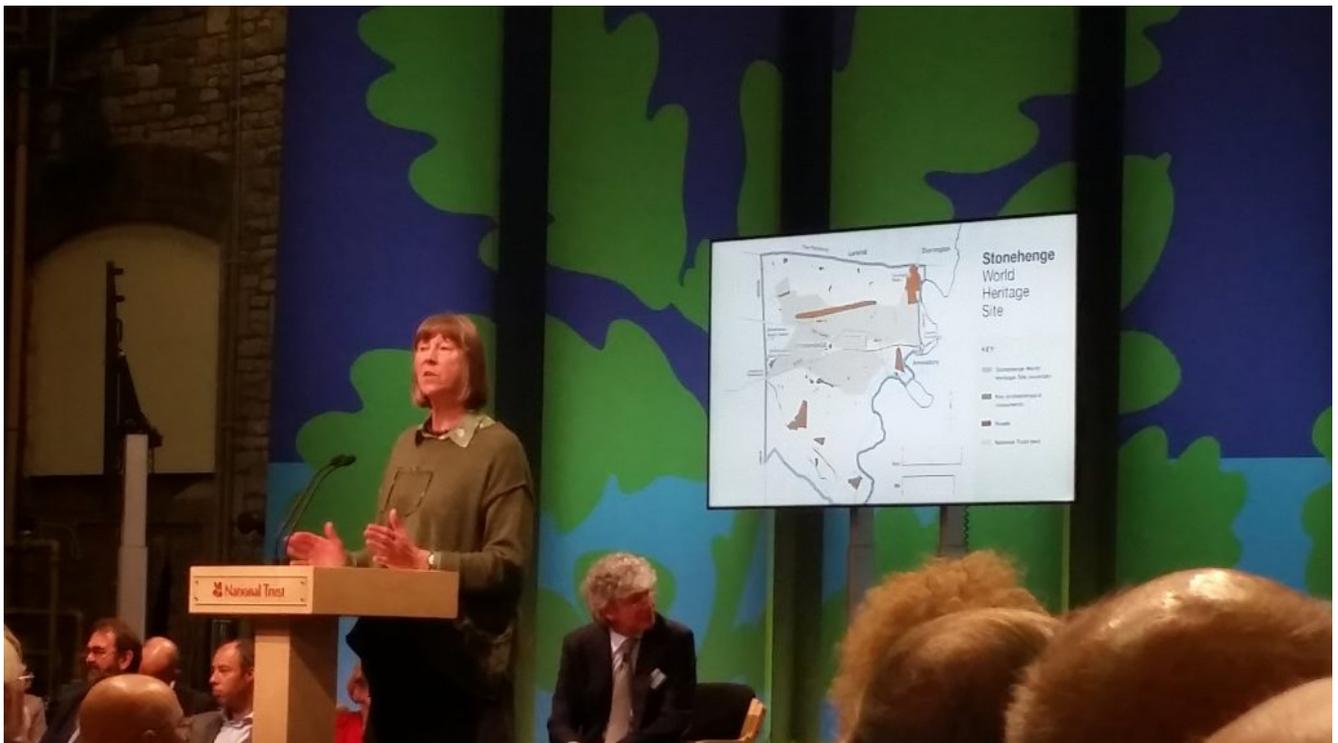
Will the UK Government finally come to its senses and reconsider the A303 road-widening scheme and the damage it would do to our World Heritage Site? **It isn't too late to call a halt and heed the advice of UNESCO and other internationally acknowledged experts.**

A less damaging solution would properly and rightly protect

the remarkable surroundings of Stonehenge about which we now know so much more than we did a hundred years ago.

For more information, please see our [comprehensive briefing about the A303 Stonehenge scheme](#).

National Trust votes against its founding principles



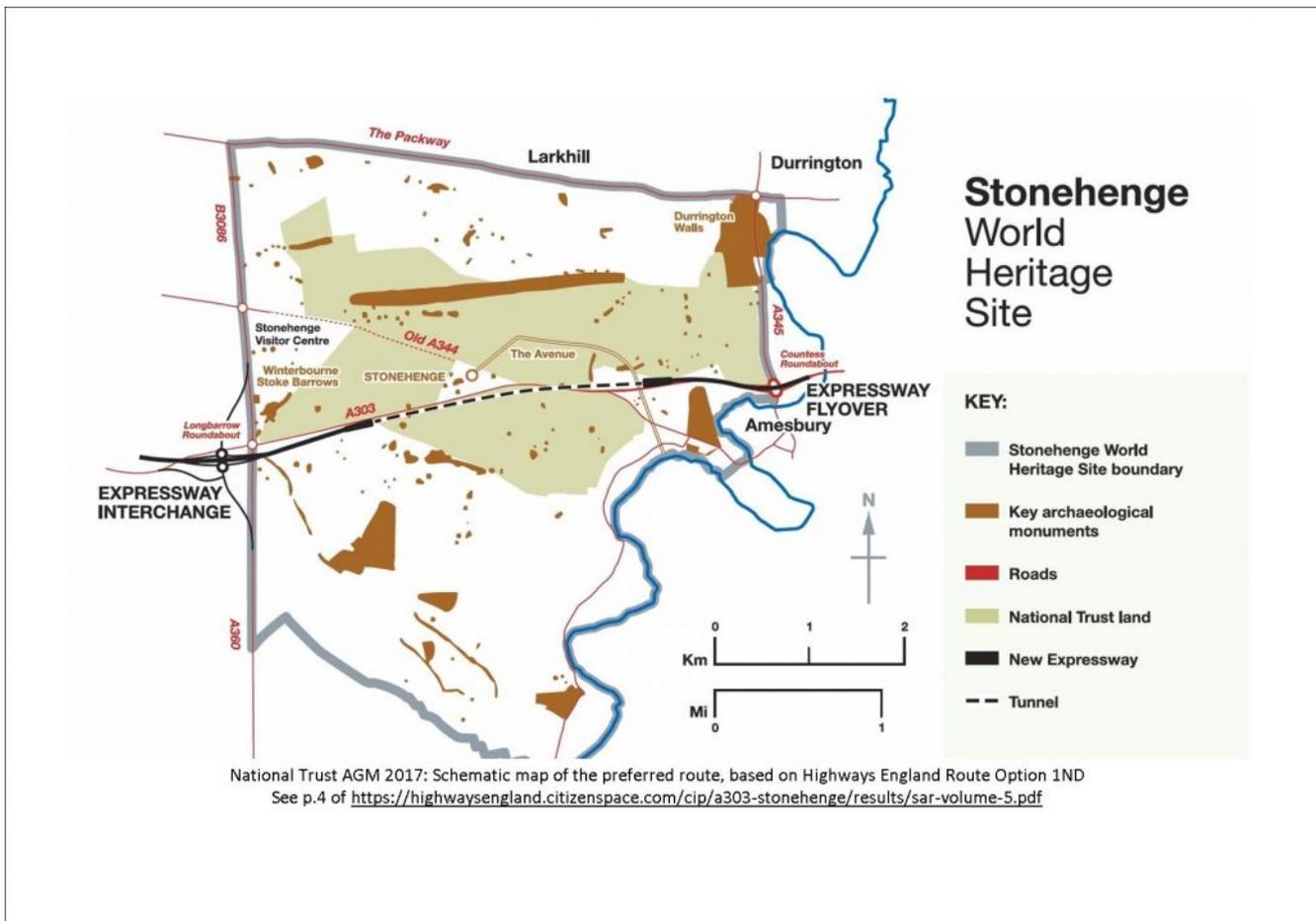
Proposer, Dr Kate Fielden, asks the Trust to stick to its founding principles and think very carefully before lending its name to a road scheme that will irrevocably damage a World Heritage Site.

Last Saturday, the [National Trust AGM debated](#) a motion about the National Trust's involvement in the design and construction of the Stonehenge tunnel and above ground

sections of the A303 Expressway.

The members' motion asked the Trustees to reaffirm its founding purposes to protect special places; to respect World Heritage Convention obligations and to acknowledge that any scheme that involves surface engineering across any part of the WHS will damage the WHS, in the Trust's own phrase "For Ever".

Members voted by a fairly narrow margin to maintain the Trust's support for Highways England's preferred route: a short tunnel past the Stones with about a mile of new dual carriageway through the World Heritage Site.



Map showing Government's preferred route for the new A303 Expressway through the World Heritage Site (WHS), including a 2.9km tunnel. Land owned by the National Trust within the WHS is coloured green. Many monuments (shown in brown) are on land south of the A303 managed by farmers and a nature reserve for

statutorily protected birds.

While the Trust won the vote, it wasn't by a convincing margin. Over 42% of those who voted (excluding abstentions) wanted the Trust to review its position. If the 11,089 abstentions were included, fewer than 50% were against the Resolution. This must give the Trust pause for thought.

You can view the results of the voting papers submitted by 1.3% of the Trust's five million members that participated [here](#).

The votes cast against the motion by the Chairman as proxy ensured the motion was lost. Members had not been made aware in the Trust's written response to the motion that UNESCO's World Heritage Committee had urged the Government to look at further options for widening the A303 "with a view to avoiding impacts on the OUV [outstanding universal value] of the property", including a bypass and "longer tunnel options to remove dual carriageway cuttings from the property".

Worryingly, Highways England is ploughing on regardless, ignoring the advice of [UNESCO](#)

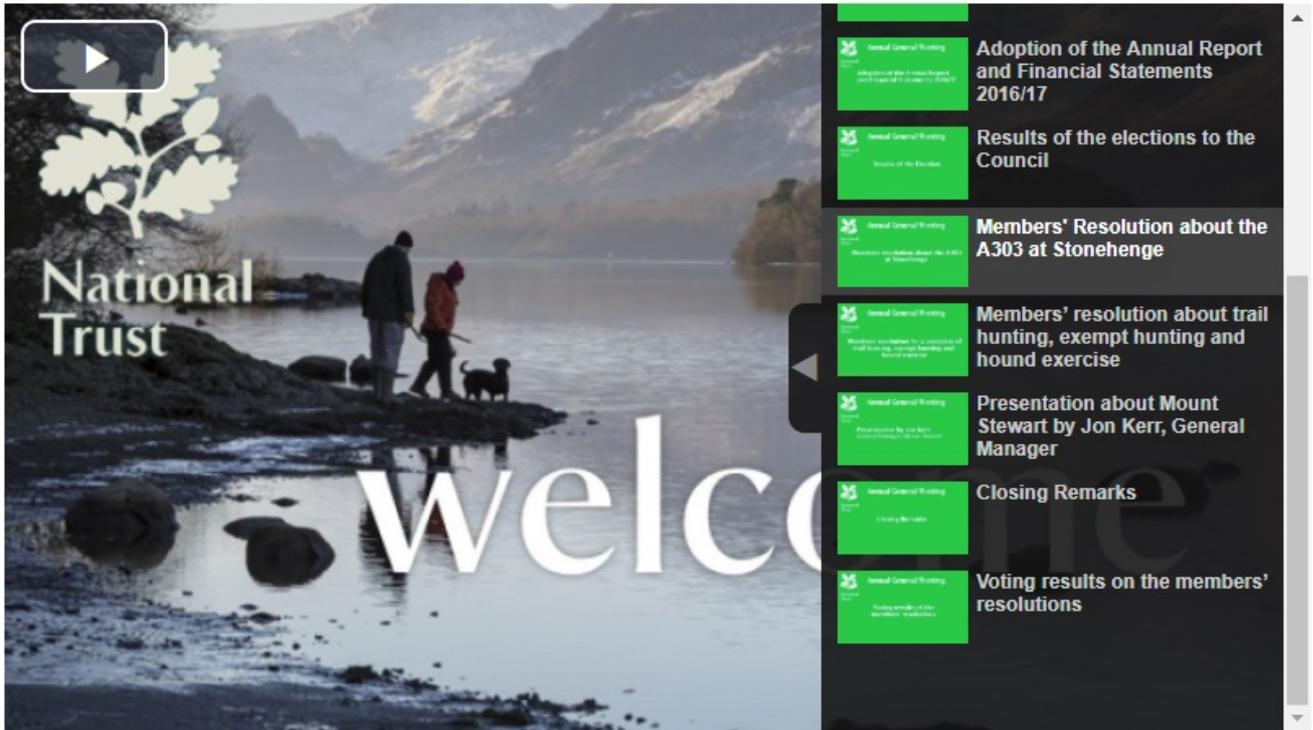
Watch this space!

WATCH THE DEBATE

Click on image to view the 46 minute debate. 11 clips and highlights posted below.



National
Trust



AGM 2017

Kate Fielden proposes the motion

Tom Holland seconds the motion

Carys Swanwick opposes the motion

Tom Oliver quotes from the National Trust's own guidance

A young resident speaks up for the next generation

Kate Freeman asks whether independent advice about the longevity of the scheme had been sought

Ian Wilson, Assistant Director responsible for the A303 Stonehenge scheme, replies on behalf of the National Trust

David Wilson suggests strengthening the National Trust's negotiating hand

Cate LeGrice Mack points out strategic shortcomings

Professor Carys Swanwick concludes the case against on behalf of the Board of Trustees

Kate Fielden makes final comments and appeals to members to vote for the motion

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**Some unanswered questions
about Stonehenge and the A303**



Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb

Baroness Moulsecoomb asked three written Parliamentary questions about the Stonehenge tunnel plan and safeguarding World Heritage Sites in October 2016. The answers given on behalf of the Departments for Transport (DfT) and Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) appeared not to address the questions directly.

The questions and answers follow with Stonehenge Alliance (SA) comments in italics beneath:

Q [HL2027](#) To ask Her Majesty's Government whether Highways England plan to investigate using (1) a tunnel which avoids visual and physical damage to the Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites World Heritage Site and its setting, and (2) traffic management measures to discourage travel at peak times, for the A303 at Stonehenge.

A Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon for the DfT answered on 14 October:

Highways England are considering a number of options for improving the section of the A303 close to Stonehenge, which include a variety of tunnel options. The results will be

available for consideration at a public consultation to be held in 2017. However, they do not have any plans for the historic site at Avebury, as the A4361 is the responsibility of Wiltshire Council.

Highways England are committed to encourage the public to plan their journeys in advance and to consider using England's motorways and major trunk roads of peak hours.

SA In answering for the Government, Lord Ahmad omitted to say whether Highways England is investigating an A303 tunnel that would avoid the World Heritage Site (WHS) at Stonehenge; nor did he refer to traffic management measures for the A303 at Stonehenge.

Q [HL2028](#) To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking towards adopting the recommendation of the Joint World Heritage/ICOMOS Advisory Committee on Stonehenge that the asset life design of the A303 widening scheme should "incorporate asset resilience and future proofing in design".

A Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon again replied for the DfT on 14 October:

The Government has proactively sought the views of the Joint World Heritage/the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) Advisory Committee and welcomes its recommendations.

Highways England are supported by Historic England to consider the asset resilience and future proofing for their proposals for this section of the A303. This will be presented at a public consultation on proposed route options in 2017.

SA It is difficult to see how the expertise of Historic England is relevant here, except insofar as any road improvement ought to be governed by the paramount considerations of the WHS and its protection. It seems that we shall have to wait to see what is being undertaken in order to

incorporate asset resilience and future proofing in road widening design.

Q [HL2029](#) To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they plan to enact primary legislation ensuring that UK World Heritage Sites receive statutory protection from inappropriate planning consents.

A Lord Ashton of Hyde answered for the DCMS on 11 October 2016:

Where appropriate UK World Heritage sites are afforded statutory protection through designation of specific assets through existing legislation. Other aspects of World Heritage Sites are key material considerations in the determination of planning applications.

SA *The Government didn't answer this question. It is true that a considerable number of our historic and natural assets are protected under UK legislation. These include scheduled monuments, grade I listed buildings and certain designated areas such as Special Areas of Conservation. Such designations do not, however, give statutory protection to extensive WHSs such as Stonehenge and Avebury in their entirety, although legally protected assets such as scheduled monuments may lie within them.*

What seems to have been overlooked here is that WHSs themselves are considered by the Government – along with scheduled monuments, protected wreck sites, battlefields, grade I and II listed buildings, grade I and II* registered parks and gardens – to be “designated heritage assets of the highest significance” for which “substantial harm or loss . . . should be wholly exceptional” (National Planning Policy Framework, para. 132).*

Lord Ashton's reply infers that only “aspects” of WHSs are key material considerations in determining planning applications: Government planning policy guidance and the World Heritage

Convention clearly demand a great deal more.

*While ambiguities remain over what should be protected, it seems obvious to us that **statutory protection** for UK WHSs would remove much confusion and ensure the proper safeguarding of WHSs in line with World Heritage Convention obligations. Our WHSs, despite being protected under international law, are highly vulnerable to the ambitions of developers. International law, unlike UK legislation, may be disregarded in the UK.*