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 re-consider 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.

Sleep walking into a national scandal

An excellent video by Matt Sibson of Ancient Architects that comprehensively demolishes any thoughts that the A303 Stonehenge road scheme is about conservation. At the heart of Sibson's objection is the commodification of Stonehenge, tidying up the landscape and making it look "pretty" for tourists whilst risking the destruction of our "ancient wonders", known and unknown, contained within the World Heritage Site. Below we quote liberally from Sibson's compelling argument by kind permission.

"This video is not about the standing stones of Stonehenge, it's about the bigger picture. The whole landscape is truly awe inspiring with dozens of known structures and countless others unexcavated."

"The underlying geology will be tampered with and the water table will certainly be affected [by the 1.8 mile tunnel, 8 metre high flyover and 1.6 miles of Expressway]." "This colossal work will be devastating."

"We potentially as a nation are allowing damage to a site of extreme historical importance. [This project] is about removing the road from the landscape for as little money as possible to open up the site for tourism […] It's about making the site look more pretty. It's a nice idea but not if archaeologists say this will harm the landscape and put many important sites at risk."

"It's all about money and tourism […] The whole project is really a national scandal."

Sibson wants to raise awareness of the devastation whilst we have the chance. "We the people can change these scandalous

plans. Please share this video to educate more people, and follow Stonehenge Alliance to say no."

@MattSibson

Busting the Mythbusters!



A 'mythbusting' item has been published by English Heritage as part of a joint press release on behalf of English Heritage, National Trust and Historic England. We reproduce these 'mythbusters' with our responses beneath.

***PLEASE NOTE 6 August 2020**: Since publishing the link to English Heritage's page above their mythbusters item has been removed. We have pasted the original copy below.*

- **English Heritage says: The proposed tunnel won't run**

under Stonehenge. The current proposals are for a 2.9km tunnel to run about 600m to the south of the current A303 surface road. The stability of the stones will not be affected at all.

The Alliance says: *The Stones stand within c.10 sq.mls of a c.5.4km-wide UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS). UNESCO has advised the Government to seek alternative road solutions to avoid damaging the WHS. Geotechnical survey work is incomplete: ground stability may be an issue.*

- **English Heritage says: A tunnel won't remove the stones from sight.** Removing the busy and noisy road means that there will be more opportunities for people to get out of their cars and explore the world heritage landscape that has for years been severed by the road.

The Alliance says: *Several generations of motorists and passengers value the view of the Stone monument from the A303: this would be lost. Most visitors would have to pay to see the Stones. Footpaths and byways would be fenced. Much of the WHS is private land.*

- **English Heritage says: There is no evidence that the proposed tunnel will damage the Mesolithic site of Blick Mead.** The proposed tunnel and any infrastructure needed to improve the Countess roundabout are well away from the site (Blick Mead is 700m away from the roundabout). Highways England is aware of the water table issues and will be assessing any potential impact on the site.

The Alliance Says: *The extent of Blick Mead is unknown and needs further investigation. A massive flyover would pass alongside and possibly over part of the site; it would also impact on a Grade I Listed house, its Registered park, and a Conservation Area. Water table issues are still uncertain.*

- **English Heritage says: It's not a 'done deal'.** There's still work to be done on the tunnel proposals, and the scheme is likely to change, on the basis of feedback from the current consultation process. Later this year, Highways England will make their application for a Development Consent Order (DCO) – a special type of planning permission for nationally significant infrastructure projects.

The Alliance says: *The Government is committed to a short tunnel in the WHS. The consultation process assumes that the scheme is a 'done deal' since objections to it will apparently not be considered. Consultation is being undertaken without full information available. [In the event the Examining Authority recommended against the scheme].*

- **English Heritage says: Doing nothing isn't an option.** The A303 past Stonehenge regularly carries 24,000 vehicles, nearly twice as much traffic as it was designed for, and on a summer weekend that figure leaps to 29,000. The result is severe congestion which compromises the WHS. It also causes delays, affecting local communities, commuters and visitors to Wiltshire. With around 120,000 new jobs and 100,000 new homes expected across the South West by 2021, and even greater growth after that, the A303 will get busier still.

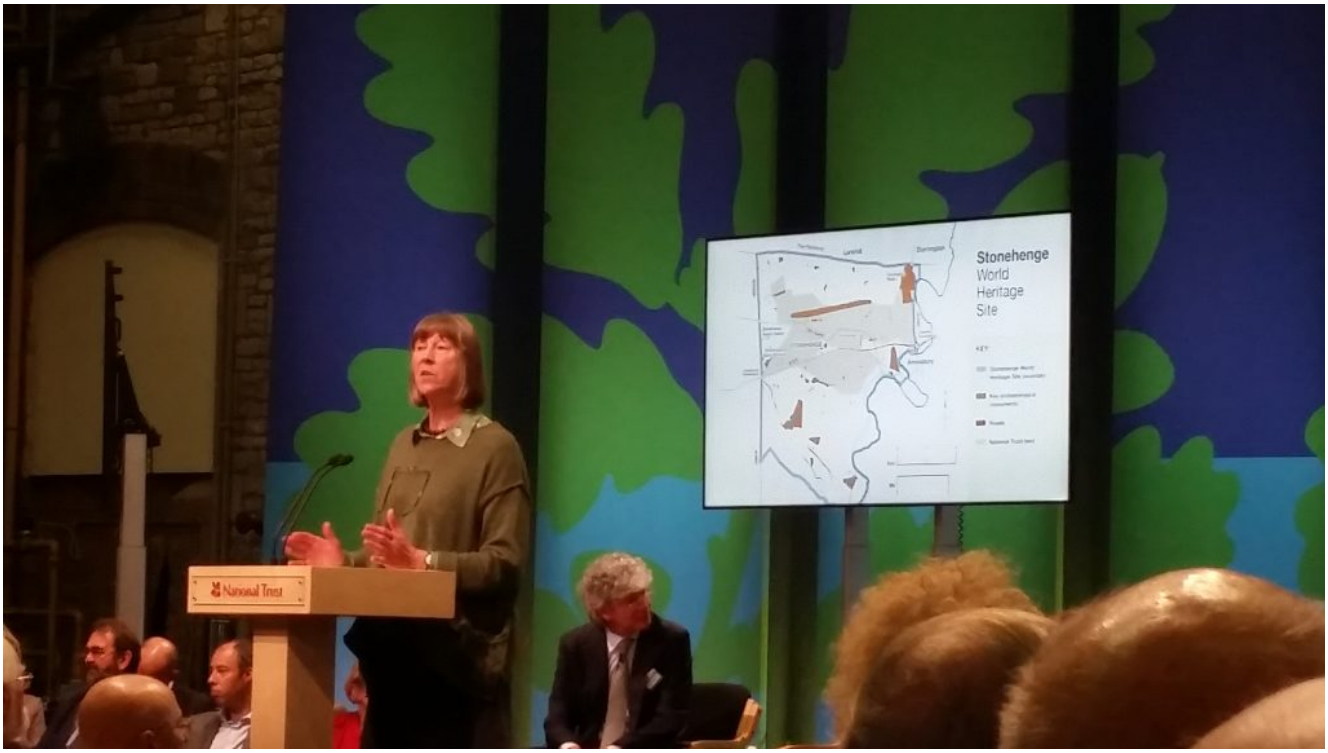
The Alliance says: *Doing nothing would be better than trashing a WHS. But measures could be taken now to stop rat running and reduce congestion. There is far worse regular congestion in towns and cities in the South West. Road widening induces more traffic, placing strain on adjoining roads. New technology may revolutionise transport over the next 20–30 years, making road widening unnecessary.*

Highways England's consultation runs until 6th April. Details of the scheme can be seen here. The consultation booklet

here and the official consultation response form here.

Check out our website, Facebook and Twitter for more about the scheme. We have made some initial non technical suggestions here for responding to the consultation. We will publish a fuller response after we have had time to study the documentation.

National Trust votes against its founding principles

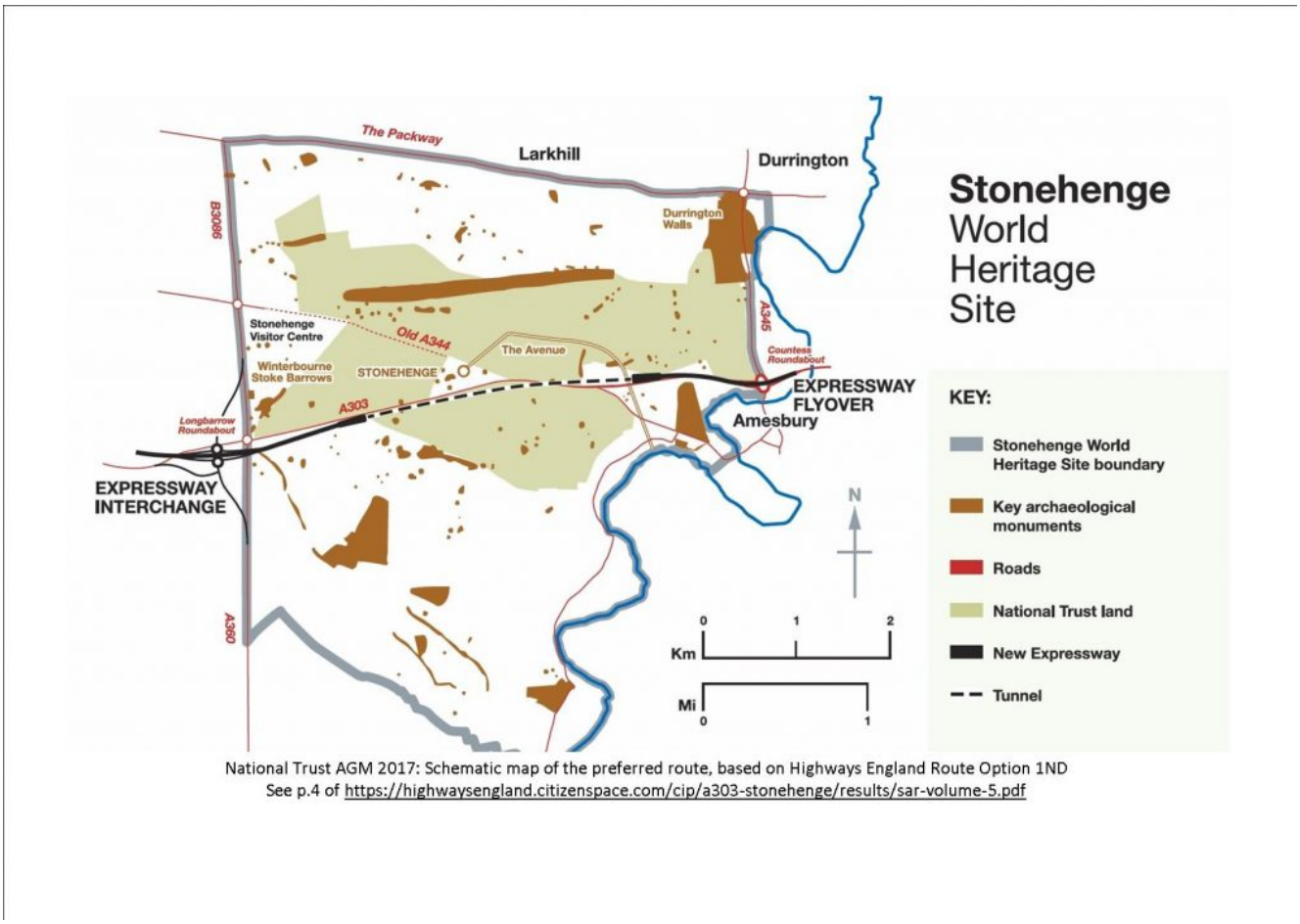


Proposer, Dr Kate Fielden, asks the Trust to stick to its founding principles and think very carefully before lending its name to a road scheme that will irrevocably damage a World Heritage Site.

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.



National Trust AGM 2017: Schematic map of the preferred route, based on Highways England Route Option 1ND
See p.4 of https://highwaysengland.citizenspace.com/cip/a303-stonehenge/results/sar-volume-5.pdf

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".

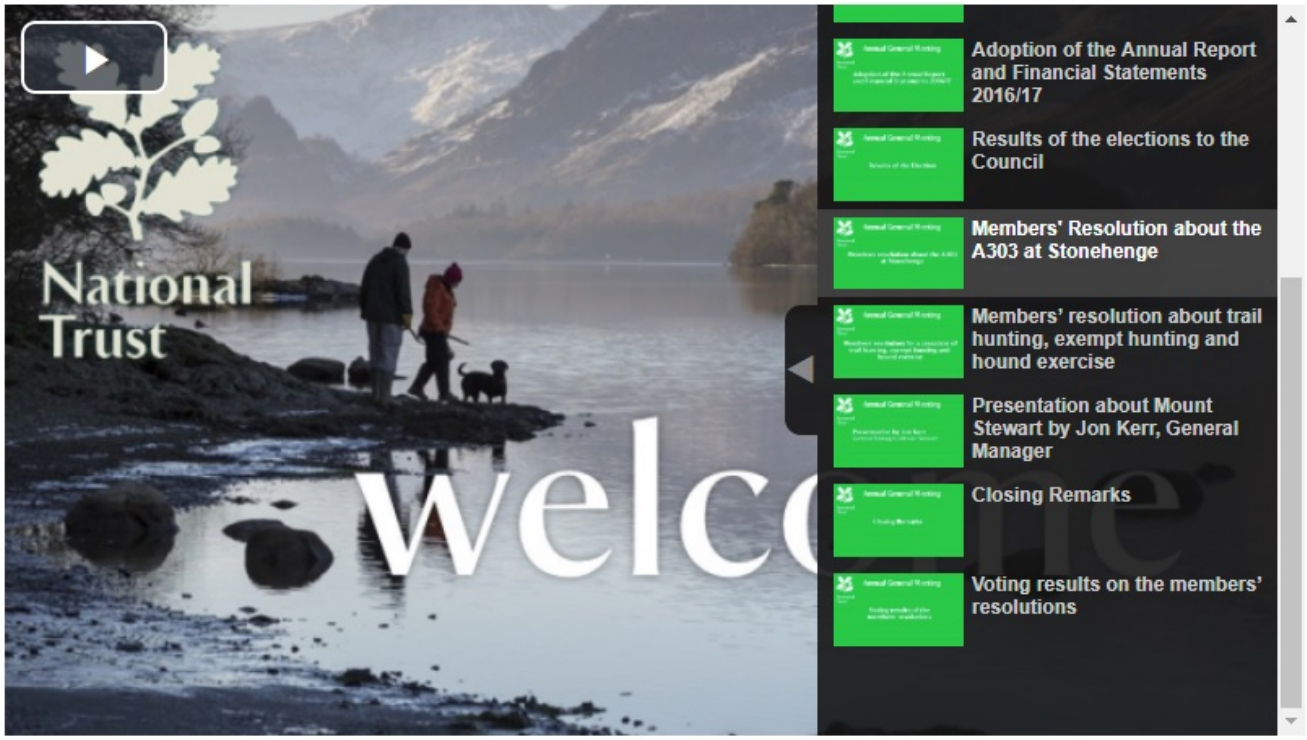
Worryingly, Highways England is ploughing on regardless, ignoring the advice of UNESCO

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

Follow Save Stonehenge campaign and sign up to our blogs in the right hand column.

Dear Candidate, I have 3 questions for you…

An A level history student from near Stonehenge who has signed our petition was filmed this week asking all UK candidates to protect the Stonehenge World Heritage Site from further damage, rightly pointing out that

> *"This is my heritage! What message will you send to future generations?"*

The three questions asked, that you might like to pose as well, are:

“If elected will you

1. *Strongly oppose any further damage to the Stonehenge WHS, especially from road building?*
2. *Seek to strengthen protection for our WHSs through legislation?*
3. *Argue for less damaging alternatives to road building*

The General Election is your opportunity to quiz candidates and influence the decision not to turn the A303 through Stonehenge World Heritage Site into a 4-lane ‘expressway’ within one of the world’s most famous prehistoric landscapes.

The second question highlights the weakness of World Heritage Sites in the UK, which have no legal protection, unlike National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Look out for hustings advertised in local papers and radio stations as well as their Facebook and Twitter feeds. They are not always well advertised so check out this **crowd-sourced list of local hustings** and search by constituency name.

All your candidates can be found by **post code or constituency on the BBC election site here**.

Let us know how you get on!