

THE STONEHENGE ALLIANCE

From the Chairman, George McDonic, MBE, BL, DIPLTP, DPA, FFB

The Rt Hon Chris Grayling, MP,
Secretary of State for Transport,
Department for Transport,
Great Minster House, 33 Horseferry Road,
London, SW1P 4DR

Sent by email on 27 July 2017

Dear Secretary of State,

Stonehenge and the A303

I write on behalf of the Stonehenge Alliance of non-governmental organizations and individuals, which encourages enhancement of the World Heritage Site (WHS) and its setting and maintains a watch over major development proposals that would impact adversely on them. Our particular concerns at the present time stem from the Government's £1.4bn project to widen the A303 between Amesbury and Berwick Down, to include a 2.9km (1.8mile) twin-bored tunnel under part of the WHS which is some 5.4km across.

You will, I am sure, be aware that in view of its obligations under the World Heritage Convention, the Government invited and received UNESCO World Heritage Centre/International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) advisory missions to Stonehenge in October 2015 and January/February 2017. The latter mission was undertaken during Highways England's recent public consultation.

It appears that the report of the first advisory mission was misunderstood by Highways England who proceeded with the damaging 2.9km tunnel scheme regardless of the report's advice *and* that of ICOMOS-UK, who wrote to your predecessor on 5 November 2014, warning that "associated portals and dual carriageways could have a highly adverse impact on other parts of the World Heritage landscape that cannot be set aside however great the benefits of a tunnel."

The second UNESCO/ICOMOS Advisory Mission's Report was made publicly available at the end of June 2017. It is critical of the process of decision-making and of the method used to assess the impact of the road scheme on the WHS and its outstanding universal value (OUV). The report reiterates that improvements gained by a 2.9km tunnel at the centre of the WHS cannot be offset by significant damage to areas of the Site outside the tunnel.

These report findings were endorsed by UNESCO's World Heritage Committee in its adopted report and decision on 6 July 2017, in the presence of representatives of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The World Heritage Committee urges the UK Government to "explore further options with a view to avoiding impacts on the OUV of the property", including a

southern bypass of the WHS and “longer tunnel options to remove dual carriageways and cuttings from the property.” Significantly, the Government is requested to

“... manage the timing of the consent and other statutory processes of the project to ensure that the World Heritage Centre, ICOMOS and the World Heritage Committee can contribute to the evaluation and decision-making processes at appropriate stages”.

The Government is also requested to submit a report to the World Heritage Centre on the implementation of its advice by 1 February 2018.

We were therefore concerned to hear that Jesse Norman, MP, in a Westminster Hall debate on 19 July 2017, said that Highways England’s “preferred route” announcement on the A303 at Stonehenge will be made “later this year”. This seems to be based on a previous timetable and one that does not appear to take on board UNESCO’s recommendations. Consequently, we are wondering whether the relevant Government Departments are communicating effectively on this matter given that more time is likely to be needed to reconsider the scheme in the light of UNESCO’s advice.

Should UNESCO’s advice be disregarded, we fear that the WHS may be placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger and, ultimately, lose its designation altogether.

The second Advisory Mission also recommended that a new ‘consultative’ arrangement be established “...with stakeholders, local communities, residents, civil society, Stonehenge alliance, ICOMOS UK as well as professional archaeologists, academics and universities to engage into a dialogue with communities concerned.” We are keen to hear how the Government proposes to take this forward and are willing to engage with such a process.

I hope that you will be able to reassure me that any announcement of a preferred route for the A303 at Stonehenge will be delayed until such time as the advice of the second Advisory Mission and the World Heritage Committee is taken fully into account: notably on reassessment of heritage impacts according to correct understanding of ICOMOS’ guidance;* and further consideration of solutions that would meet the Government’s World Heritage Convention obligations.

I look forward to hearing your response to our concerns.

Yours sincerely,

George McDonic
Chairman, the Stonehenge Alliance

* International Council on Monuments and Sites. (2011). *Guidance on Heritage Impact Assessments for Cultural World Heritage Properties*. Paris: ICOMOS

THE STONEHENGE ALLIANCE IS SUPPORTED BY:
Ancient Sacred Landscape Network; Campaign for Better Transport;
Campaign to Protect Rural England; Friends of the Earth; and
RESCUE: The British Archaeological Trust

Copies to:→

cc. The Rt. Hon. Theresa May, MP, Prime Minister
The Rt. Hon. Philip Hammond, MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer
The Rt. Hon. Karen Bradley, MP, Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport
The Rt. Hon. Jeremy Corbyn, MP, Leader of the Opposition
The Rt. Hon. Sir Vince Cable, MP, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Party
The Rt. Hon. John Hayes, MP, Minister of State for Transport
Tom Watson, MP, Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Secretary of State for
Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
Andy McDonald, MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Transport
Jesse Norman, MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Transport
John Glen, MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Arts, Heritage and Tourism
Molly Scott Cato, MEP, Green Party MEP for the South West
Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb
Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury, Liberal Democrat Lords Spokesperson for
Culture, Media and Sport
Dr Isabelle Anatole-Gabrielle, Head of Europe and North America Unit, UNESCO
World Heritage Centre
Susan Denyer, Secretary, ICOMOS-UK