

THE STONEHENGE ALLIANCE

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

Mr Derek Parody
Project Director for A303 Stonehenge
Major Projects Complex Infrastructure Programme
Temple Quay House
2 The Square
Temple Quay
Bristol, BS1 6HA

15 January 2015

Dear Mr Parody,

A303 Stonehenge project

Thank you for your letter to me of 18 December which I was disappointed to find did not address any of the specific points I raised in my letter to you of 1 December 2017 under headings concerning consultation, heritage impact assessment and protection of the World Heritage Site and its setting.

Highways England's public statements concerning the A303 Stonehenge project

I would like to take this opportunity to point out that there are a number of statements on Highways England's A303 Stonehenge website (<http://roads.highways.gov.uk/projects/a303-stonehenge-amesbury-and-berwick-down/>) that might be considered misleading in certain respects.

Of particular concern to the Stonehenge Alliance are the following statements.

1. Highways England says:

"The preferred route avoids many important archaeological sites, including newly-discovered barrows just to the east of the A360. The modified alignment also avoids any risk of the road intruding on the view of the setting sun from Stonehenge during the winter solstice."

It is known to archaeologists and others that the preferred route would impact physically and/or visually on a number of important archaeological sites; most particularly it would have a severe physical, environmental and visual impact on the WHS itself.

It is the impact of light that would interfere with the winter solstice sunset. The revised position of the proposed west tunnel portal and the grade separated junction to the west of it might still give rise to intrusive light glow that would impact on the sunset as viewed from the henge and indeed other key monuments, such as the Greater Cursus.

2. Highways England says:

"Upgrading the A303 between Amesbury and Berwick Down into high quality dual carriageway will be good for the people and businesses of the South West and for the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Site."

“Now the Government has made money available to find the right solution. The different routes explored in the past gave us a large bank of knowledge to start from and we are confident we now have the best route.”

UNESCO has clearly advised that a 2.9km tunnel would not be good for the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Site. Thus, the ‘right solution’ has not been found. The preferred route is one that has been put forward within the constraints of affordability, achievability and value for money – although the last criterion is apparently now admitted by Highways England to be of questionable validity. The ‘right solution’ is one that would satisfy UNESCO’s advice to examine longer tunnel or bypass options.

3. Highways England says:

“This provides a once-in-a-generation opportunity to create a new South West Expressway, where mile-a-minute travel is the norm – and restoring Stonehenge to a more tranquil setting and reconnecting it with its surrounding landscape and monuments.”

A generation is normally considered to cover a span of around 25 years. In the last 25 years, there have been other proposals for removing the A303 from the immediate setting of the Stones, at least one of which was spoken of as ‘the best we can get’. There remains scope during this generation for a better solution than the preferred route that would not only be in line with UNESCO’s advice but also ensure that the WHS would remain undamaged for future generations to enjoy.

The henge is not disconnected from its surrounding landscape now, despite the lack of a safe A303 crossing place for pedestrians.

4. Highways England says:

“The improved A303 will enhance biodiversity in the World Heritage Site and reduce the impact of congestion, noise and emissions on local communities. This area includes Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, a National Nature Reserve and an RSPB reserve, with a large variety of protected species. Through reducing rat-running traffic on local roads, reducing noise impacts and improving air quality, a free-flowing expressway will improve the vitality and safety of local villages.”

It is impossible to gauge at present whether or indeed to understand why the preferred route would enhance biodiversity. It could cause a reduction in some protected species, such as bats and rare birds. Traffic noise and presumably also emissions would be likely to increase for the communities of Winterbourne Stoke and Countess Road.

5. Highways England says:

“The Stonehenge World Heritage Site is cut in two by the A303 at the moment and is spoiled by the sounds and sights of traffic. Placing much of the A303 in a tunnel will protect and enhance this important setting. As well as making Stonehenge easier to get to, the project will help people explore the rest of the World Heritage Site by reconnecting the northern and southern halves of the site.”

Placing much of the A303 in a tunnel as proposed would not protect and enhance the important setting of the WHS; indeed, it would severely damage it. There is, as often appears to be the case, a misunderstanding about what the WHS is: it is not simply the henge monument and its immediate setting; it is some 10 sq. miles of archaeological landscape that surrounds and includes the henge, some of it visible from the monument and much of it not but all of it comprising the ‘landscape without parallel’ described in the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value.

Please see comments above re pedestrian access to the southern part of the WHS, most of which would remain inaccessible, as at present, owing to agricultural use and the presence of an RSPB bird sanctuary.

In conclusion and in the public interest, we feel it would be appropriate for there to be no potential for misunderstandings in Highways England's statements about the preferred route. I hope that you will assure me, please, that appropriate amendments will be made to the statements we refer to.

I also hope that you will send me a more comprehensive answer to those issues raised in my letter to you of 1 December 2018.

We propose to publish this letter on our website in due course, along with earlier correspondence on these matters.

Yours sincerely,

George McDonic

Chairman, the Stonehenge Alliance

- cc. The Planning Inspectorate, National Infrastructure Directorate, Bristol
Parvis Khansari, Service Director for Highways & Transport, Wiltshire Council
Cllr Bridget Wayman, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Waste,
Wiltshire Council
Cllr Richard Gamble, Portfolio Holder for Heritage, Arts and Tourism, Wiltshire Council

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