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05 December 2017

Dear Mr George McDonic

Thank you for your letter of 31 October to Jesse Norman, conveying your views on the recent A303 preferred route announcement. I am replying on his behalf, as the Department for Digital, Culture Media and Sport has responsibility within Government for our obligations under the World Heritage Convention.

I wish to stress that the UK Government views the stewardship and protection of our World Heritage sites as a priority. I would like to reassure you that no approval will be given for any scheme until a full impact assessment has been carried out. The proposed scheme for the tunnel will now be subjected to extensive public consultation and rigorous examination within the planning system, including assessment against the relevant ICOMOS guidance on heritage impact assessment to ensure that any impact on the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Site is taken into consideration.

The route has been modified to avoid important archaeology, including the 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.

The UK government has already invited two UNESCO/ICOMOS missions to advise on the development of the scheme. We have taken cognisance of their mission reports, to the extent that they can be reconciled. We expect to host a third advisory mission in 2018, where we will

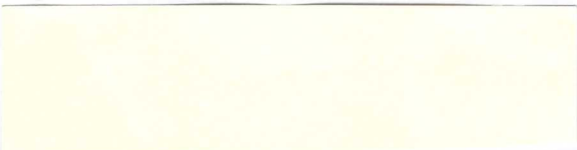
together review the recommendations from the previous mission. This mission will also examine the preferred route scheme, and will include discussions with stakeholders. We would expect to invite representatives from the Stonehenge Alliance to participate accordingly.

The traffic problems at Stonehenge WHS have been a widely recognised issue for many years. Currently the A303 bisects the WHS landscape, negatively impacting on the setting of Stonehenge and other significant prehistoric monuments within the WHS. As far back as 2007, UNESCO and ICOMOS expressed regret that the A303 Road Improvement Scheme, which contained a proposal for a 2.1km tunnel, had been cancelled due to the cost, and urged that a solution be found to the traffic congestion in the WHS. The removal of the roads surrounding Stonehenge is therefore a long-standing objective which took a major step forward with the closure and grassing over of the A344 in 2013 as part of the Stonehenge Environmental Improvements Programme. Placing the A303 in a tunnel at this point now offers the opportunity to significantly enhance the setting of Stonehenge and its OUV, and to finally address the traffic problems and reunite the ancient landscape.

There is a consensus across all interested parties that the outstanding universal value of Stonehenge and Avebury WHS must be protected for this and future generations. My Department will be closely monitoring the development of the tunnel scheme as it progresses, and will continue working to ensure that the site's OUV and international heritage value is taken fully into consideration as the project progresses.

Sincerely,

Enid Williams



Senior Heritage Policy Adviser

Department for Digital, Culture Media and Sport