

THE STONEHENGE ALLIANCE

From the Chairman, George McDonic, MBE, BL, DIPLTP, DPA, FFB
c/o Kate Fielden, Hon. Secretary,

Duncan Wilson, OBE,
Chief Executive, Historic England,
4th Floor, Canon Bridge House
25 Dowgate Hill
London EC4R 2YA

Sent by email on 1 December 2017

Dear Mr Wilson,

Stonehenge World Heritage Site and the A303

I write on behalf of the Stonehenge Alliance, a group of NGOs which has long taken a close interest in proposals for improvements at Stonehenge. Our concern is the proper protection of the whole of the World Heritage Site (WHS) and its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), in line with the UK Government's commitments under the World Heritage Convention, Government policy and Historic England's advice, local planning policy and the objectives of the Stonehenge WHS Management Plan.

We hope that you may be able to explain a puzzling anomaly that has arisen concerning the A303 'preferred route' announced last September.

We have been informed by Chris Taylor, Director of the Complex Infrastructure Programme, that Highways England has an 'ongoing close working' with Historic England on 'designated features and archaeology' in respect of the A303 project. We therefore assume that Highways England has been relying on Historic England for advice on heritage impact assessments (HIA) and other aspects of care for the historic environment of the WHS and its setting.

You will, I am sure, be aware of the two UNESCO World Heritage (WH) Centre/ICOMOS advisory missions invited to Stonehenge in 2015 and 2017 and of their reports. The report of the second advisory mission suggests that further investigation of tunnels longer than 2.9km or a bypass of the WHS should be undertaken. That advice was endorsed by UNESCO's WH Committee in July this year and is consistent with the framework of protection for the WHS and its setting.

The 'preferred route' for the A303 project, however, disregards UNESCO's advice. Mr Taylor told us that it is the DCMS' position that the advisory mission had not followed ICOMOS' guidance on HIA for WH properties and that the DCMS would be discussing this matter directly

with UNESCO. This implies that Highways England's advisers in the UK consider the WH Centre and the WH Committee to have been mistaken in their advice and decision, respectively.

If Historic England and Highways England had doubts about UNESCO's advice, given well before the preferred route announcement was made, we wonder why they or the DCMS didn't seek clarification from UNESCO prior to that announcement.

We find this situation unusual and unexpected and hope that you will be able to throw some light on the position of Historic England in the matter. Should there be no reconsideration of the A303 preferred route, the logical conclusion must be that the Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites WHS could be placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger and might ultimately lose its designation, to our country's considerable embarrassment.

I would be grateful if you should, please, clarify for me the position of Historic England in its role as adviser to Highways England on the A303, and in its apparent support for the 'preferred route' despite UNESCO's advice.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

George McDonic

Chairman, the Stonehenge Alliance

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