

The Stonehenge Alliance (1)

Press statement 11 September 2017 (embargoed until 2230 hrs)

UNESCO ignored as damaging Stonehenge scheme announced

The Stonehenge Alliance is shocked by Highways England's A303 Stonehenge "preferred route" announcement today.

The proposed scheme, at huge expense (£1.6bn), would cause severe and permanent damage to the archaeological landscape of the World Heritage Site (WHS) in direct conflict with international advice to the UK Government earlier this year. (2)

UNESCO's World Heritage Committee urged the Government to explore options that would not impact on the outstanding significance of the Site, including a southern bypass and "longer tunnel options to remove dual carriageway cuttings from the property".

UNESCO made it clear in reporting to the Committee that

"It is not considered satisfactory to suggest that the benefits from a 2.9km tunnel to the centre of the property can offset significant damage from lengths of four lane approach roads in cuttings elsewhere in the property."

The proposed 2.9km (1.8 mile) tunnel would leave some 2.5km (c.1.6 miles) of four-lane expressway, substantially in cuttings, well within the WHS. There are very serious implications for the Mesolithic site of Blick Mead, as well as a number of sites of the Neolithic and Bronze Ages for which the WHS designation was given.

Kate Fielden of CPRE and RESCUE said:

"We are shocked at Highways England's indifference to UNESCO's advice. The project needs a complete re-think, not a minor tweak which still threatens major harm to this iconic landscape. The potential risk of loss of Stonehenge's World Heritage Status casts shame upon our country and those responsible for caring for our heritage."

For more information, please see our website at www.stonehengealliance.org.uk.

Notes:

(1). 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.

(2) Stonehenge Decision, 41st Session of UNESCO's World Heritage Committee, 6 July 2017. <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/2017/whc17-41com-18-en.pdf>, p.139, No.56.