

News update by the Stonehenge Alliance^[1]

4 July 2019

UNESCO World Heritage Committee condemns A303 Stonehenge tunnel scheme

UNESCO's World Heritage Committee has today adopted unchanged its Draft Decision on the proposals for the A303 at Stonehenge [2] supported by the Alliance at the meeting in Baku.

Despite acknowledging improvements to the Scheme, the Committee considers that it

“retains substantial exposed dual carriageway sections, particularly those at the western end of the property, which would impact adversely on the Outstanding Universal Value of the Property”

and encourages the UK Government

“to not proceed with the A303 route upgrade for the section Amesbury to Berwick Down in its current form.”

The UK Government is urged to seek longer tunnel sections *“which reduce further the impact on the cultural landscape”*, and to place the western tunnel portal outside the property boundary.

The Government's A303 Stonehenge Scheme is currently undergoing formal Examination as a Significant Infrastructure Project.[3] Such projects are normally approved subject to planning and legal provisos. Among these provisos is that the Secretary of State as decision-maker must have regard to the requirement that the Scheme should not

“lead to the UK being in breach of its international obligations.” [4]

The Scheme is not only being challenged in terms of cost [5] but now also on non-compliance with the Government's obligations under the World Heritage Convention, notably Article 4. [6]

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. <http://stonehengealliance.org.uk/>. Contacts: 01672 851859 or 07980 421996.
2. UNESCO WH Committee Report and Decision: <https://whc.unesco.org/archive/2019/whc19-43com-7B-en.pdf>, Item 95, pp.203–05; and see text of Decision, below.
3. A303 Stonehenge Examination: Infrastructure Planning Inspectorate website: <https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/projects/south-west/a303-stonehenge/>
4. Planning Act 2008, Section 104 (4). <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/29/section/104>
5. E.g., Public Accounts Committee Report, *Transport infrastructure in the South West* (3 July 2019): <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/public-accounts-committee/news-parliament-2017/transport-infrastructure-south-west-report-published-17-19/>.

6. Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (UNESCO 1972)
<http://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/>

World Heritage Committee Decision text [ref. Note 2, above]

Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) Decision: 43 COM 7B.95

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Document WHC/19/43.COM/7B,
2. Recalling Decision 42 COM 7B.32, adopted at its 41st session (Manama, 2018),
3. Commends the State Party for the design refinements which have occurred to the A303 route Amesbury to Berwick Down upgrading project within the property, including an additional land bridge and longer covered section, as well as the proposed legacy benefits which have been incorporated within the project, and notes the additional investigations and assessments undertaken by the State Party to consider longer tunnel, further land bridge and cut-and-cover options and resulting alternative western portal locations;
4. Notes with concern, that although the current scheme, which is now subject to the Development Consent Order (DCO) examination process, shows improvement compared with previous plans, it retains substantial exposed dual carriageway sections, particularly those at the western end of the property, which would impact adversely on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property, especially its integrity, and therefore encourages the State Party to not proceed with the A303 route upgrade for the section Amesbury to Berwick Down project in its current form;
5. Urges the State Party to continue to pursue design solutions which reduce further the impact on the cultural landscape and OUV of the property through longer tunnel sections, so that the western portal is located outside the property boundary;
6. Requests the State Party to ensure that this present World Heritage Committee Decision (43 COM 7B.95) is conveyed to the Planning Inspectorate, to other decision-makers, to known stakeholders and to the wider community through the DCO online exhibition, and that mechanisms are put in place to ensure that the World Heritage Centre, ICOMOS International and the World Heritage Committee continue reviewing and assessing the design plans at the appropriate stages of the project, in conformity with the Operational Guidelines;
7. Also requests the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by 1 February 2020, an updated report on the state of conservation of the property and the implementation of the above, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 44th session in 2020.