

New Civil Engineer: Stonehenge Tunnel | Planning Inspectorate advised against scheme due to heritage concerns

16 NOV, 2020 BY [CATHERINE KENNEDY](#)

The planning inspectorate recommended that transport secretary Grant Shapps should withhold consent for the A303 Stonehenge Tunnel scheme due to the impact it would have on the World Heritage Site (WHS).

According to the Examining Authority's recommendation report, the project would cause "substantial harm" to the Stonehenge site. However, Shapps overruled this recommendation when he [gave the project the go ahead on Thursday](#).

The Examining Authority said the "adverse impacts" of the scheme would "strongly outweigh its benefits".

Its report adds: "The effect of the proposed development on the outstanding universal value of the WHS would lead to substantial harm to the significance of the designated heritage asset. In addition, there would be considerable harm to landscape character and visual amenity.

"There would also be modest harm arising from the 'loss of view of the stones' and limited harm to individuals and individual businesses and companies."

The report does acknowledge that "some cultural heritage benefits" would result, along with transport, economic, community and environment benefits.

However it concludes that it "has not been demonstrated" that the damage to the WHS is "necessary" to deliver these benefits.

Such heritage and environmental concerns have been at the forefront of discussions throughout a lengthy planning process.

The planning decision was first delayed in May to allow [the detailed archaeological mitigation strategy and the outline environmental plan to be submitted by Highways England](#). At the time, Historic England also called for close collaboration on establishing ground movement trigger levels for the tunnelling work to ensure it did not affect archaeological structures and remains.

In July, the decision was pushed back again [due to an archaeological find near the site](#). Further evaluations were undertaken, [with some seeing the delay as 'unwarranted'](#).

The Development Consent Order (DCO) granted yesterday will allow work to start on a new two-lane dual carriageway for the A303 between Amesbury and Berwick Down in Wiltshire.

However, the decision on a second Highways England application for the construction of a continuous dual carriageway on the A303 linking the Podimore Roundabout and the Sparkford Bypass has been delayed. According to the Department for Transport, this is to enable further information to be provided regarding outstanding concerns around the issue of bird strike. The deadline is now 29 January 2021.

Last month Highways England awarded a [£35M contract to Wessex Archaeology for work on the A303 Amesbury to Berwick Down upgrade in anticipation of DCO approval](#).