

# THE STONEHENGE ALLIANCE

## Alliance calls on Prime Minister to abandon damaging Stonehenge Road

### An open letter: media release 17.9.21

The Stonehenge Alliance has written an open letter to the Prime Minister (see below), asking for dualling of the A303 through Stonehenge World Heritage Site (WHS) to be abandoned. This follows the Government's decision not to appeal against the High Court judgment quashing development consent for the scheme.

The letter highlights that the world has changed since the project was first conceived. UNESCO, which has consistently expressed its concern with National Highways' (formerly Highways England) proposals for the road, warned in July after the Transport Secretary had approved the scheme that the WHS could be placed on the World Heritage in Danger List if the scheme went ahead unaltered. This came after the five senior planning inspectors who examined the scheme in 2019 recommended it be refused. Past Transport Ministers, both Conservative and Labour, also came out against the scheme. Even Grant Shapps accepted it would cause significant harm.

The letter also highlights the feeble economic case for the road, its huge price tag, and the large amount of carbon emissions it would generate. All good reasons not to proceed.

The Alliance is suggesting a new approach. Instead of rehashing the same damaging scheme, it is asking the Government to think again. It wants to see a full and open assessment of alternatives to the road, thoroughly explored in the context of safeguarding and enhancing the WHS, reducing road traffic and road emissions, and providing real alternatives to the car.

John Adams OBE, Alliance Chairman, said:

*The climate is changing – both literally and towards this highly damaging road scheme. We need a new approach that improves people's access to the South West without damaging the WHS or increasing carbon emissions. We need to give people real choice and that means investing in a better and fully integrated public transport network and other measures. Building a bigger road will just create more traffic and more congestion problems in Devon and Cornwall. Now is the time to seize the moment to forge a new path for transport and heritage policy in the UK.*

## THE STONEHENGE ALLIANCE [1]

From the Chairman, John Adams OBE  
C/o The Hon Secretary, Kate Fielden,

The Rt. Hon. Boris Johnson, MP,  
Prime Minister,  
House of Commons,  
London SW1A 0AA

Also sent by email on 14 September 2021 to [boris.johnson.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:boris.johnson.mp@parliament.uk)

Dear Prime Minister,

### **A303 Amesbury to Berwick Down: AN OPEN LETTER**

Following a successful legal challenge and quashing of the A303 Stonehenge Development Consent Order (DCO), we understand that the Transport Secretary must redetermine the application. However, strong reasons have arisen, since the announcement of RIS2 and its funding, to abandon the road scheme and for less damaging and more sustainable solutions to be brought forward, especially at a time when public expenses are overstretched.

**Harm to the UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS).** The scheme was announced in 2014 and its funding allocated prior to knowledge of the harm it would cause. Since then, three World Heritage Centre and ICOMOS advisory missions have advised less damaging options be explored. The 2021 World Heritage Committee warned the WHS might be considered for placing on the World Heritage in Danger List, should the scheme proceed unaltered.

**Finding of harm by five senior Planning Inspectors.** The examiners of the scheme in 2019 recommended against it, owing to the adverse impacts it would have on the WHS and its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), notably where the western tunnel entrances would emerge in a deep cutting leading to a major interchange at the WHS boundary. They concluded that

*“... the effects of the Proposed Development on WHS OUV and the historic environment as a whole would be significantly adverse. Irreversible harm would occur, affecting the criteria for which the Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated World Heritage Site was inscribed on the World Heritage List.”* (Report, para. 5.7.326)[2]

**It was confirmed in the High Court that the Transport Secretary found the scheme would cause significant harm to the WHS:** to attributes of its OUV and its authenticity and integrity; even so, he continues to promote it. The support for the scheme of Historic England, English Heritage and the National Trust, on which he relies, may partly arise from their managerial responsibilities which would be made easier were the project to go ahead but do not accord with their conservation and protection responsibilities.

**The poor economic case.** The Department for Transport considered the scheme to be low value for money in 2019 and the National Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee have cast serious doubts on the Scheme's value. Even then, the scheme's low value was only achieved when dubious "heritage benefits" were included, making up around 75% of its economic value.[3] Since then, the Examiners, UNESCO and the Transport Secretary have all acknowledged significant heritage harm. Now estimated to cost in the region of £2bn, with c.£7m p.a. maintenance costs, the scheme does not stand up in terms of value for money.

**Climate Emergency.** The Government needs to ensure cuts in carbon emissions, of which transport is the highest emitting sector. The recent IPCC Working Group's report[4] highlights the need for urgency. Action to reduce road building and regulate for reduction in private car use would be a positive contribution to COP26. Dually the London to Exeter rail line would assist in the 'levelling-up' of poorly connected regional centres.

The Transport Secretary intends to revise the National Policy Statement on National Networks to include matters on climate change: the responsible approach would be to delay all RIS2 projects until this revision has been undertaken.

**Public opinion.** Our petition to the Transport and Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Secretaries asking for the A303 scheme to be reconsidered now has well over 200,000 signatures, reflecting international concern about the threat to the WHS.[5] The legal challenge to the Transport Secretary's decision to grant the DCO was funded by more than 3,000 individuals – a significant indication of the strength of public feeling – with responses overwhelmingly against the scheme from the consultation stages.

### **In Conclusion**

We understand your aim for renewal of economic growth after Covid 19 and that you may see expenditure on infrastructure schemes as one way forward. We do urge you, however, to reconsider Government support for the A303 Stonehenge scheme which has serious implications for the UK in terms of: expenditure and poor economic return; climate change and addressing carbon emissions; and the credibility of our leading heritage organisations' advice on heritage protection. Our country's international reputation for responsible care of its World Heritage Sites and addressing climate change are gravely imperilled.

We hope that you will assure us that the A303 Stonehenge scheme will be abandoned and that less damaging and more appropriate options will be sought in view of the significant and unforeseen changes that have arisen since the scheme was first announced.

Yours sincerely,

John Adams OBE

### *Notes*

1. The Stonehenge Alliance is supported by: Ancient Sacred Landscape Network; Campaign to Protect Rural England; Friends of the Earth; Rescue, The British Archaeological Trust; Transport Action Network; and many individuals worldwide. <https://stonehengealliance.org.uk/> and <https://stonehengealliance.org.uk/mp-briefing/>
2. <https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/wp-content/ipc/uploads/projects/TR010025/TR010025-002181-STON%20%E2%80%93%20Final%20Recommendation%20Report.pdf>. See also: <https://stonehengealliance.org.uk/a303-stonehenge-examiners-recommended-refusal-why/>
3. <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Improving-the-A303-between-Amesbury-and-Berwick-Down.pdf> and <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmpubacc/1753/175302.htm>
4. [https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2021/08/IPCC\\_WGI-AR6-Press-Release\\_en.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2021/08/IPCC_WGI-AR6-Press-Release_en.pdf)
5. <https://stonehengealliance.org.uk/our-campaign/petition/>