

NOOKS and CORNERS

HIGHWAYS England is to press ahead with picking a construction firm for the Stonehenge tunnel, despite the high court having quashed consent for the scheme last month (see last *Eye*). If the scheme does eventually get the go-ahead, the winning constructor may find itself with an even bigger job than it bid for.

The main point on which campaigners won their case against the road tunnel plans was that not enough consideration had been given to other options involving a tunnel that's actually big enough for the job of removing the road from the world heritage site, rather than bizarrely half-arsing it and building the western exit portal inside the designated landscape.

This has always been an awful idea: while the tunnel itself would be deep enough not to impact on archaeology, the portals would do huge damage during construction and forever afterwards a huge cutting with road lights would blight the landscape.

Making the tunnel long enough to bring the new dual carriageway all the way out of the world heritage site to the west would satisfy many of those who object to the current £1.7bn scheme. But the longer tunnel option has been repeatedly dismissed as too expensive. The



Stonehenge and the unspoilt Salisbury plain

estimate given to the court was an extra £578m for the longest option (with a £264m option also available), which is indeed a lot of money, but not the "many times more expensive" bandied about by those who argue the current proposal is the best and only option.

When Piloti wrote about the road scheme in this column in 2008, the estimated cost of the whole thing was £470m – plus the £25m which had by then already been spent in feasibility work and judicial review. The latter number only keeps going up. At what point would money be better spent on the longer tunnel than more lawyers?

Meanwhile, many of the nation's less well-known henges are also worryingly neglected and getting worse. There are around 80 recognised henges – circular ceremonial structures from the late Neolithic and early bronze age – scattered around England. Some still have standing stones or visible earthworks, while others can only be identified by aerial photography and archaeology.

At least a dozen of these henges currently feature on Historic England's register of heritage at risk. Reports show these sites to have "extensive significant problems", mainly due to being on land which is ploughed for farming, and their state is "declining".

The huge Thornborough Henges complex was handed to North Yorkshire county council by Tarmac in 2016, ensuring public access, but at a cost. In return the firm has gained permission to extend its sand and gravel quarrying just 850 metres from the nearest part of the ancient site.

THE innovative former Inland Revenue HQ in Nottingham, designed by Sir Michael Hopkins, was a multi-award winner when it was built in 1994. Indeed, the practice Hopkins Architects remains so proud of the collection of eco-friendly buildings it features



The Inland Revenue Centre in Nottingham

them prominently on its website.

The development came about after Nottingham Civic Society, English Heritage and the Royal Fine Arts Commission worked together to fend off a previous ugly scheme which would have had a detrimental impact on the setting of nearby Nottingham Castle. The Hopkins campus, on the other hand, successfully inserted large and clever modern buildings into the sensitive historic setting, reflecting the distinctive local brick architecture while using new technology.

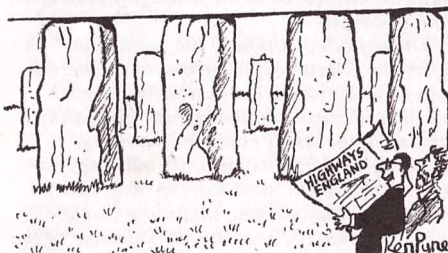
Alas, the buildings were flogged by HM Revenue & Customs to property firm Mapeley in 2001 under the notorious 20-year PFI lease-back scheme (Eyes passim), which is now drawing to an end. At the end of their lease, the tax people are moving to the new-build Unity Square in Nottingham city centre and Hopkins' Castle Meadows buildings are on the market – with prior approval to convert them into housing if the buyer so wishes.

Campaigners, including Nottingham Civic Society and the Twentieth Century Society want the buildings to be listed to prevent harm to some of the features that made them so ingenious. Many aspects of the natural ventilation systems – such as the curvy ceilings, the glazed stair towers that draw air through the building, and roofs that can be raised and lowered to extract heat – depend on the existing internal layout as flexible open-plan offices, in order to work properly.

The project was the first office development in the UK to gain a "BREEAM Excellent" award from the Building Research Excellence Trust, followed by a slew of architectural and environmental prizes in the mid-90s.

"We have consulted the original architects who have confirmed that while converting the buildings for residential use would not be impossible, it would be very difficult to achieve, ensuring that the building's features of special interest are preserved," say the organisations in their joint application for listing.

The estate agents marketing the site at £36m suggest it could continue as offices, or be converted for medical or educational uses as well as residential.



"We finally solved the A303 problem"