

WILTSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

A303 STONEHENGE TUNNEL

UNESCO Mission Report: National Highways Response

Background

About the Society

- Founded in 1853 to “educate the public by promoting, fostering interest in, exploration, research and publication on the archaeology, art, history and natural history of Wiltshire for the public benefit”
- The Society runs the Wiltshire Museum which holds many important collections from the Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site (WHS). The collection is Designated by Government as being of national significance
- We work in partnership with Salisbury Museum which acts as the archaeological repository for archaeological archives from the Stonehenge part of the WHS
- The Society commenced the purchase of land around Stonehenge to protect it in perpetuity. The land was later transferred to the National Trust
- The Society took an active role in commenting on previous schemes for the A303
- The Society supported the development of the Stonehenge Visitor Centre and the closure of the A344
- The Society has endorsed the 2015 Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site Management Plan
- We responded to the Highways England consultation process and gave oral evidence at a DCO Issue Specific Hearing in June 2019. Our response to the Highways England consultation was agreed by our Board of Trustees and incorporated the results of a consultation with our 1,000 members.
- The Director met the UNESCO Mission on 20 April 2022 and stated our agreed position

General Principles

In commenting on previous schemes for the A303, the Society identified key principles that guided its response. These were that any scheme should:-

- Minimise damage to known or potential archaeological remains
- Minimise physical impact or visual intrusion on open landscape
- Maximise the efficient use of existing infrastructure
- Maximise the reversibility of any new works

Our evidence presented to the Public Inquiry in 2004 also highlighted that there were a number of issues that should be considered:-

- The possibility of one day uniting the Avenue in its full length from the River Avon to Stonehenge
- Reducing the severance of the northern and southern parts of the WHS
- Improving the setting of the barrow cemeteries in and around the WHS
- Improving access and circulation to key archaeological sites within the WHS landscape

Our Response

In line with the General Principles outlined above, we strongly support the following recommendations of the UNESCO Mission:-

- Recommendation 3: The proposed western portal of the current Scheme, and associated dual carriageway within a cutting, should not proceed without substantial amendment to avoid adverse

impacts on the WHS and the OUV of the World Heritage property, to the fullest extent that is reasonably practicable

- Recommendation 4: If the Scheme proceeds, the underground section of the western approach (tunnel and/ or cut-and-cover) should be extended, to at least to the western edge of the WHS boundary

We are pleased that National Highways have welcomed the following recommendations:

- Recommendation 6: That there should be an extensive archaeological mitigation programme
- Recommendation 7: In the event that unexpected archaeological finds were to occur, that provision should be made to stop work and evaluate options for improved conservation outcomes
- Recommendation 9: If the Scheme proceeds, a monitoring regime should be establish to identify any changes to the water table which affect Blick Mead, and any changes should be addressed thorough a process of adaptive management
- Recommendation 11: If the Scheme proceeds, the Scientific Committee should be requested and empowered to facilitate ongoing discussions and consideration of the most appropriate methods to achieve comprehensive archaeological salvage and mitigation

Our view, given in our response to the 2018 DCO Consultation, is in line with the recommendations of the UNESCO Mission.

We feel that the current Scheme will have a significant impact on the OUV of the WHS. Our view remains that the tunnel should be extended beyond the boundaries of the WHS and we feel that it is especially important that the western tunnel portal is located outside the WHS. We do not endorse the current Scheme and our responses to the questions in the consultation are given with the aim of minimising its impact on the WHS.

David Dawson, Director, 27/9/2022