

Written evidence submitted by Kate Fielden for the Stonehenge Alliance

Executive summary

The Stonehenge Alliance:

- opposes proposals for A303 widening at Stonehenge now under consultation;
- is concerned about fake and/or misleading news given by Government Departments and/or their agents and the National Trust about the A303 scheme; and
- supplies some recent instances of fake and/or misleading news given to the public in press releases.

1. The Stonehenge Alliance

We are a group of national NGOs and individuals concerned about the proper protection of the Stonehenge World Heritage Sites (WHS). We were formally constituted in 2001 to oppose a Government A303 widening scheme at Stonehenge which was examined at a Public Inquiry in 2004 and withdrawn in 2007. We have renewed our campaign to oppose the current A303 scheme proposals. Our supporter-organisations are: Ancient Sacred Landscape Network, Campaign for Better Transport, Campaign to Protect Rural England, Friends of the Earth and Rescue: The British Archaeological Trust. [Information about the Alliance](#) can be seen on our website.

2. The A303 'preferred route' proposals

2.1. The Government is proposing to construct an A303 Expressway across the Stonehenge half of the UNESCO-designated Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites WHS. Highways England is currently consulting formally on the scheme prior to making an application for a Design Consent Order later this year. The scheme includes a 2.9km tunnel, c.2km of new 4-lane highways in deep cuttings and twin tunnel portals, all within the WHS. There would be massive grade-separated junctions at the WHS boundaries. These major engineering works would damage the internationally recognised archaeological landscape of the WHS, impacting adversely on archaeological remains and the integrity and settings of the WHS and its upstanding monuments. The recently-discovered Mesolithic site of Blick Mead would be compromised by a major flyover which would also compromise the settings of Grade I Listed Amesbury Abbey and its Registered Park, as well as the Amesbury Conservation Area.

2.2. Although this Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project is being managed under the Department for Transport, there are clearly major considerations concerning the heritage aspects of the scheme which are the responsibility of the DDCMS. The National Trust is a close partner in broadly supporting the scheme.

2.3. UNESCO's [World Heritage Committee advised](#) the Government last July to look at less damaging alternatives for widening the A303, such as a longer tunnel or a WHS bypass. If this advice is not followed, there is a risk that the WHS will be placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger. The Department for Transport has passed our letter of concern to the DDCMS for reply and there is evidence of shunting responsibilities between Departments when much closer communication would be sensible so that they speak accurately and with one voice. The National Trust, owner of land around the Stones which would be avoided by the proposed tunnel, has issued joint press releases with Historic England and English Heritage about the A303 scheme.

2.4. The matter of severe and lasting damage to such a famous World Heritage Site is shocking to [leading archaeologists](#) and those who care about our heritage and have informed themselves of what is planned. The Government has a duty under the [1972 World Heritage Convention](#) to protect and

preserve the WHS for the enjoyment of future generations, not just that part of the WHS nearest to the Stones.

3. Instances of fake news

3.1. It is evident that misleading and false information has consistently been given to the media and the public about the A303 scheme. The following examples are given.

3.2. A joint [press release issued by Historic England, English Heritage and the National Trust](#) for the beginning of the current consultation on the road scheme on 8 March 2018, states that

- “The options put forward today by Highways England go a long way towards protecting and enhancing the World Heritage Site (WHS), according to the three agencies responsible for its care and protection”; and
- “We will continue to engage with international heritage advisors and others to help to ensure Highways England fully assesses the heritage impact and comes up with the right solution for the World Heritage Site.”

3.2.1. Neither of these falsely reassuring statements is correct: the road scheme clearly does not “go a long way towards protecting and enhancing the WHS”; while the bodies issuing the press release apparently have no intention of ensuring “the right solution for the WHS”, when Government constraints of “affordability, deliverability and value for money” placed upon the road scheme would ensure otherwise.

3.3. A [press release on behalf of Highways England on 20 December 2017](#), about archaeological survey work on the A303 Stonehenge scheme, states

- “This survey work . . . is part of the company’s continuing commitment to preserving the World Heritage Site and in particular its Outstanding Universal Value.”

3.3.1. The road scheme with a c.2.9km tunnel would not preserve the WHS; nor would it preserve its Outstanding Universal Value, as UNESCO has made clear in its advice referred to at 2.3, above.

3.4. A [press release issued by Highways England for the Government](#) on 5 March 2018, announcing the arrival of the third UNESCO/ICOMOS Advisory Mission to Stonehenge, states at the outset

- “Highways England will explain to international experts how preserving the World Heritage Site is at the centre of plans to build a road tunnel at Stonehenge.”

3.4.1. This statement is false: “preserving the WHS” is very clearly not at the centre of plans to build a road tunnel at Stonehenge. Was this statement cleared by the DDCMS? If not, why not?

3.4.2. Further misleadingly reassuring statements follow in this press release, amongst which is:

- “It will show how the £1.6bn scheme will restore the tranquil environment and setting of the Stonehenge monument and surrounding landscape by removing the sight and sound of the busy road.”

3.4.3. The proposed A303 Expressway would not remove "sight and sound of the busy road" from the Stonehenge WHS landscape, although the above statement gives the impression that it would.

3.4.4. The same press release makes no mention of the on-going public consultation on the road scheme: why not?

4. Recommendations

We hope that the Select Committee will wish to look into the matter of false and misleadingly reassuring information given to the media and disseminated to the general public about the heritage impacts of the A303 scheme at Stonehenge by the National Trust, the DfT and those bodies (Historic England and English Heritage) which ultimately come under DDCMS governance. Such news and information appears as more than just "spin": it is misleading and, in certain instances, false.

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