

STONEHENGE ROAD PROPOSALS ICOMOS-UK POSITION STATEMENT September 2002

1. ICOMOS-UK

1.1 ICOMOS-UK is recognised by Government as having special status with regard to World Heritage sites. With its parent body, ICOMOS, it is official advisor to UNESCO on Cultural World Heritage sites.

1.2 Our comments in this Statement stem from:

- Our responsibilities for World Heritage sites and thus focus on the impact of the proposed A303 road schemes for the significances of the Stonehenge World Heritage site.
- The implications of PPG15, which acknowledges that World Heritage status is a 'key material consideration' for the determination of planning applications that might have an input on World Heritage sites.
- The acknowledged primacy of the World Heritage Site Management Plan: such plans are a Government requirement and reflect its responsibilities under the 1972 World Heritage Convention to ensure that the significances of World Heritage sites are sustained in the long-term.

1.3 The approach outlined in this Position Statement has the backing of the ICOMOS-UK Executive Committee and will be shown to ICOMOS International and to UNESCO, if ICOMOS-UK is asked to report on the impact of the Stonehenge road proposals for the Stonehenge World Heritage site.

2. Background

2.1 Since the Highways Agency's preferred Route announcement of a 2.0 km cut and cover tunnel in 1999, ICOMOS-UK has had an active dialogue with the Highways Agency.

2.2 We appreciate the time and effort that they have put into consultations, presentations and discussions with the ICOMOS-UK World Heritage Committee, as the proposals have progressed.

2.3 We particularly appreciate their willingness to respond to our requests first for an assessment to be carried out on a long, 4.5km bored tunnel on an equivalent basis to that of the 2km (now 2.1km options), and secondly for an assessment of the 2.67 km tunnel which extends the 'shorter' options at the eastern end.

2.2 This Statement is our response to the request by the Highways Agency for comments on these two assessments and on the assessments for the four detailed options for 2.1km length schemes.

2.4 The detailed assessments undertaken have allowed us to respond to the various options with reasoned judgments based on adequate knowledge of engineering and environmental factors

3. Methodology

3.1 In setting out this Position Statement, we have considered the formal assessments of these two longer options alongside the facts we have for the four shorter options. Our position is based on consideration of the way each of the options:

- Measures up to our view of the overall aims of this project
- Is in line with the principles we believe should underpin the delivery of those aims
- Impacts on the significances of the World Heritage Site
- Is in line with the World Heritage Site Management Plan

3.2 What we have not commented on are issues of time and cost. We believe that ICOMOS should take the long view and not be constrained by what are relatively short-term time factors. We also believe that it is for Government to weight the cost factors against the various tangible and intangible benefits set out in this paper, taking into account of what we consider to be the very high, non-economic, cultural heritage value of the overall site. Neither have we commented in specialist detail on technical engineering and environmental aspects.

4. Significances of Stonehenge

4.1 Stonehenge now has acknowledged universal value through its designation (with Avebury) as a Cultural World Heritage Site in 1986, under the terms of the 1972 World Heritage Convention. This inscribed Stonehenge as:

- a unique example of megalithic architecture, set within a dense collection of some 700 known archaeological sites, which together form what has been called the 'most archaeologically sensitive land surface in Europe'. (Prehistoric Society, 1999)
- one of the finest examples of a ritual and ceremonial cultural landscapes where the spatial relationships are as significant as the individual sites

4.2 Stonehenge has become one of the most visited historical sites in the UK

4.3 Its powerful symbolism has made it a national, and, indeed, an international icon

5. Aims

We believe the main aims of the road scheme should be to:

- Take traffic and traffic noise away from the Stonehenge landscape
- Allow visitors to roam freely across the entire Stonehenge landscape
- Improve the conservation of the archaeological 'spatial' landscape, reuniting parts disjointed by the present roads

6. Principles:

We believe that in carrying out these aims, the following principles should be adopted:

- The Stonehenge landscape should be equated with the boundaries of the WHS, which coincides for the most part with the 'archaeological landscape', and not with the 'Stonehenge Amphitheatre', a concept that refers to a smaller area within the WHS and is predicated on the idea of an area within which the Stones are visible. The wider Stonehenge landscape, rather than just the Stones, should be the central concern of this project
- In archaeological and landscape terms, the spaces in between identified monuments within the WHS are as significant as the monuments themselves
- Minimal irreversible damage should be inflicted on the archaeological resource, for which the WHS has been inscribed. This resource includes above and below ground sites
- A long-term view should be taken to ensure that the significances of the WHS are sustained and that people's long-term expectations are acknowledged
- The responsibilities of the State Party should be fully acknowledged in respect of its duty under the World Heritage Convention to ensure that the significances of the WHS are sustained in the long-term
- The benefit analysis of comparative options should include intangible as well as tangible benefits. This means considering the very high local, national and international 'existence' value of the Stonehenge landscape and the 'bequest' value put on it by those who believe it to be a key part of their national and international heritage.

7 Construction

The proposals contain three basic construction options:

- Cut and cover
- Bored - within this option there are two different methods - sprayed concrete and machine bored
- A hybrid - bored with a cut and cover at Stonehenge Bottom

7.1 Cut and Cover

Taking account of the extreme sensitivity of the archaeological landscape of Stonehenge and of the known sites, it is clear that the cut and cover option would inflict what we consider to be unacceptable damage to the archaeological resource. On top of this, this method would also produce an above ground 'bund' in Stonehenge Bottom and we believe this would be an unacceptable intrusion into the landscape bowl of Stonehenge Bottom, which some believe to be a crucial ceremonial space closely related to the major structures.

7.2 Hybrid

This scheme suffers from one of the disadvantages of the cut and cover scheme - the above ground 'bund' at Stonehenge bottom.

7.3 Bored

7.3.1 Within this option there are two different methods: sprayed concrete and machine bored. Both emerge as methods that inflict least damage on the landscape in archaeological and visual terms.

7.3.2 The sprayed concrete method would be shallower than the machine bored method and would necessitate a concrete slab at Stonehenge Bottom and we understand that this might be just visible as a landscape feature as it will only be possible to cover it with a minimal depth of soil. Being shallower than the machine bored method, the sprayed concrete could still have the potential to damage underground archaeology.

7.3.3 The machine bored method would not have the disadvantages outlined for the sprayed concrete method, as it is deeper below ground. We understand that the implications for water flow below ground have yet to be fully resolved for this option but that de-watering proposals during construction and wells to transfer water away the tunnel and then back into the ground are being discussed with the Environment Agency.

8. Length

The assessment proposals consider three options:

- 2.1 kilometre
- 2.67 kilometre
- 4.5 kilometre

These are considered separately

8.1 2.1 Kilometre Option

This 'short' option would provide substantial visual benefits to the landscape in terms of removing the main road and traffic from the Stonehenge amphitheatre. Its impact in terms of noise reduction is difficult to quantify from the information we have but it would appear that the noise emanating from the remaining western portion of the A303 within the WHS would still be quite high over the western half of the WHS and noise from the eastern portion of the remaining A303 would be very high near Kings Barrow Ridge, an area proposed as a major access point in English Heritage's new plans for visitor access from the proposed new visitor reception building. What this option does not deliver is the reinstatement of key spatial features and associations within the WHS, particularly the Avenue, which remains divided by the road, and the relationship of the Normanton Barrows to the Stones, which in visual as well as access terms would remain compromised. Freedom to roam over the WHS would remain limited at the eastern and western ends of the site. And visually the WHS landscape would still remain scarred by approximately 2.4 kilometres of road.

8.2 2.67 Kilometre Option

This option removes some of the disadvantages of the short option, in particular it would re-unite the Avenue and noise levels at Kings Barrow Ridge would be substantially reduced. This option takes the eastern end of the tunnel as far east as it appears reasonably possible to achieve. The remaining disadvantages of the short option - relating to the western end of the WHS - would still apply.

8.3 4.5 Kilometre Option

This option removes all the disadvantages outlined above for the two shorter options. What it achieves is a huge benefit in visual terms across the whole of the central and western end of the WHS and across a high proportion of the eastern end. Noise levels would be reduced to minimal levels from the main road and most significantly the key spatial features and associations of the cultural landscape would be reinstated with unhindered visitor access made possible to the majority of the WHS. We assume that this option would not require intrusive ventilation shafts within the WHS.

9. Portals

The impact of these is considered for the three main length options in turn.

9.1 Short 2.1 kilometre option:

At the western end the siting of the portals would have considerable visual impact on the Normanton Barrows and on the landscape as seen from the western approaches to the WHS. At the eastern end the portals would impact in a visually disturbing way on the Kings Barrow Ridge, which would be in close proximity.

9.2 2.67 kilometre option

At the western end, the concerns remain the same as for 9.1. The extra approximately 600 metres of tunnel to the east allows the portals there to move away from Kings Barrow Ridge which would have considerable visual benefit.

9.3 4.5 kilometre option

For this long option, the portals at the eastern end would be in the same position as for the 2.67 km option. At the western end, the portals would be removed from within the WHS thus delivering considerable visual benefits to the Normanton Barrows and to the overall western end of the WHS. We have not evaluated in detail the impact of the portals and their approaches outside the WHS but consider that landscaping schemes, using the spoil from the excavated tunnel, should be considered to screen the impact of the western portals in an imaginative way from the south-west.

10. Conclusions

10.1 In weighing up the options that have been assessed, we believe that it is essential to give adequate value to the very high significance of Stonehenge as part of the nation's cultural identity. The wide Stonehenge landscape is of universal value as an archaeological ensemble of immense scale and complexity: its apparent ceremonial associations, combined with the dramatic form and scale of the Stones, give it an added inspirational and evocative quality. We believe it is valued even by those who never visit it as something that should be protected as part of everyone's shared heritage and bequeathed intact to the next generation. It has become a national icon, readily recognised by the majority of the population.

10.2 Weighing up Stonehenge's cultural value against other more easily quantifiable aspects is not easy but it is a type of equation that is becoming more commonly addressed as the need to find sustainable solutions, and justify those solutions, becomes part of decision making. We believe that a sustainable solution to the Stonehenge road issue should attempt to reconcile cultural, environmental, economic and social significances and show how these feed off each other.

10.3 The cultural resource of Stonehenge deserves protection but equally it deserves to be made available to people to enjoy through both visual and physical access. That enjoyment should be as wide as possible and as little compromised as possible. The Stonehenge landscape has changed over several millennia and continues to change: it is still a living cultural landscape where farmers and those living nearby are acknowledged as having a key social role along side people who visit.

10.4 The economic benefit of Stonehenge is enormous though the way it acts as a magnet to tourists both from within the UK and from overseas.

10.5 On the environmental side solutions should be exemplary in that they conform to best environmental practice and enhance rather than detract from the environmental significances of the area.

11. Recommendations

11.1 Taking account of all of this and considering the Highways Agency assessments against our aims and principles, ICOMOS-UK has reached the following conclusions.

11.2 We believe that the greatest cultural and social benefit is delivered through the 4.5 kilometre tunnel option. We also believe that this option should deliver considerable economic benefits in the long term. As we do not have environmental expertise we can only rely on what is given in the assessment, but this suggests that this option would not create unduly detrimental environmental consequences. Overall therefore we support this option as, in our opinion, it best meets the needs of this crucially important site.

11.3 The 2.67 kilometre option, although delivering a lesser range of benefits, nevertheless still provides substantial benefits in cultural and social terms. Its negative impacts in terms of the visual, spatial, access and noise aspects of the western end of the WHS would nevertheless be far preferable to the status quo and the shorter options. We would therefore support this option as a fallback position.

11.4 We do not support any of the 2.1 kilometre options. The cut and cover method would have major and unacceptable archaeological disbenefits and the shorter length fails to deliver what are, in our view, substantial enough cultural and social benefits.