

# ICOMOS UK

## PRESS RELEASE

International Council on Monuments & Sites UK  
70 Cowcross Street  
London EC1M 6EJ

Tel: 020 7566 0031

Fax: 020 7566 0045

Email: [admin@icomos-uk.org](mailto:admin@icomos-uk.org)

### **WHAT PRICE WORLD HERITAGE?**

#### **RESPONSE FROM ICOMOS-UK TO A PROPOSAL ANNOUNCED BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT, ALISTAIR DARLING, FOR UNDERGROUNDING THE A303 AT STONEHENGE**

ICOMOS-UK is concerned that the proposal unveiled by Mr Darling does not go far enough in healing the scars in the Stonehenge World Heritage Site landscape or in making it available overall for people to enjoy in peace and quiet. Stonehenge is an iconic part of our cultural heritage: it deserves to be freed of noisy and intrusive traffic.

The Stonehenge World Heritage Site (WHS) is not just the megalithic Stones monument itself, nor is it a collection of archaeological sites: it is one of the most spectacular ritual and ceremonial, cultural landscapes in Europe where the spaces in between the monuments are as important as the monuments themselves. The current scheme puts 2.1 km of road underground but leaves 2.4 km as dual carriageway through the WHS landscape.

At the moment the noisy A 303 cuts through the centre of the WHS making it impossible for visitors to appreciate the overall splendour of this inspirational and evocative landscape or understand the visual relationships between the Stones and their framework of ceremonial sites.

ICOMOS-UK welcomes the decision to underground part of the A303 in a tunnel rather than use cut and cover construction. It is however concerned as to whether the comparatively short length of that tunnel can deliver sufficient benefits to the World Heritage Site. The short tunnel would not allow the reinstatement of key spatial features and associations within the WHS, particularly the Avenue which would remain divided by the road, and the relationship of the Normanton Barrow 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 remain scarred by approximately 2.4km of road.

Mr Darling acknowledges the value of landscape as a national asset in his decision not to widen the A303 through the Blackdown Hills. We believe that the Stonehenge WHS landscape is of even more significance than the Blackdown Hills and should similarly not be a candidate for an above ground dual carriageway.

We support the idea of evaluating the various lengths of tunnel using social, environmental and economic criteria - as set out by the Highways Agency. We do

however believe that those criteria should have included cultural parameters. 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 see culture as a key part of sustainable development is being acknowledged. The benefit analysis 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.

The Stonehenge World Heritage Site is a key part of the nation's cultural capital: that capital needs optimising not compromising.

Tom Hassall, President of ICOMOS-UK, says "Judged against the £5.5 billion the Government is now proposing to spend on new road building, we believe that the extra amount needed to protect the whole World Heritage Site, can be justified and would allow the UK government to fulfil its obligations under the World Heritage Convention."

*Stonehenge was inscribed as a Cultural World Heritage Site in 1986 for its universal significance 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 sensitive archaeological site in Europe'*
- *One of the finest examples of a ritual and ceremonial cultural landscape where the spatial relationships are as significant as the individual sites*

*ICOMOS-UK is recognised by government as having special status with regard to World Heritage Sites. With its parent body, ICOMOS, it is official adviser to UNESCO on cultural World Heritage Sites.*

22 April 2003