

PRESS RELEASE

STONEHENGE A303 TUNNEL SCHEME

On 12th November, Grant Shapps, Secretary of State for Transport gave approval for the A303 road improvement scheme at Stonehenge¹.

This approval is in contradiction with the views of five Independent Examiners who presided over an Independent Inquiry into the scheme and recommended that the Development Consent Order (DCO) for a tunnel and around 2km of associated dual carriageways inside the WHS should be turned down because of ‘*permanent, irreversible harm*’ to the World Heritage site (WHS)².

The Inspectors’ Report, which is very clear and legible, states that:

‘The Proposed Development would benefit the OUV [Outstanding Universal Value] in certain valuable respects, especially relevant to our present generation. However, permanent irreversible harm, critical to the OUV would also occur, affecting not only our own, but future generations. The benefits to the OUV would not be capable of offsetting this harm. The overall effect on the WHS OUV would be significantly adverse’,

and would ‘introduce a greater physical change to the Stonehenge landscape than has occurred in its 6,000 years as a place of widely acknowledged human significance.’

- and these views mirrors the recommendations of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in its 2019 decision³.

While ICOMOS-UK supports the Government’s intention to facilitate traffic improvements, we are dismayed that the views of the Inspectors and the World Heritage Committee have been disregarded. The approval of the DCO in the light of the acknowledged harm to OUV is not good news for the credibility of the World Heritage Convention, which relies on the international commitment of Governments to uphold their obligations and sustain the OUV of their WHSs.

END

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¹ The Secretary of State for Transport’s letter: <https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/wp-content/ipc/uploads/projects/TR010025/TR010025-002180-STON%20-%20Secretary%20of%20State%20Decision%20Letter.pdf>

² The Examining Inspectors’ Report: <https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/wp-content/ipc/uploads/projects/TR010025/TR010025-002181-STON%20%E2%80%93%20Final%20Recommendation%20Report.pdf>

³ World Heritage Committee decision: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/7543>