

# Press information

## **Better short-term improvements than permanent wrong solution for Stonehenge**

13 June 2006

**“We cannot stand by and allow a second-rate solution to damage forever one of the world’s most important landscapes” warns Chairman Sir William Proby**

As Government decisions over the future of road schemes at Stonehenge approach a critical point the National Trust today sounds the alarm over the future of this World Heritage Site.

For over seventy years, the Trust has been acquiring parts of the ancient ceremonial landscape integral to Stonehenge for the specific purpose of reuniting the Stones with this landscape and restoring its integrity.

Today the Trust is warning that this long term goal could be lost when the Government publishes the results of its review of possible solutions to remove the blight of road traffic from this beautiful, enigmatic and iconic landscape – arguably the most important single prehistoric and archaeological site in Europe, and acknowledged by its UNESCO World Heritage status.

**The Trust believes that none of the options under the Minister’s consideration is worthy of this site, and thus the threat to Stonehenge is now urgent, serious and imminent.**

In a letter to the Department for Transport, the Trust’s Chairman, Sir William Proby, says: “If the Government is unable to commit to implementing an acceptable long term solution for Stonehenge then it would be better to make no long term commitment at all. We should not tie the hands of future generations in our search for a solution to tackling traffic passing through this iconic landscape.”

The National Trust identifies four key issues facing Stonehenge:

- 1. Stonehenge and its ceremonial landscape are now under imminent threat of being ruined in perpetuity by the wrong**

**solution.** None of the options under consideration by the Department for Transport are worthy of such an important site.

- 2. A second-class solution for Stonehenge is wholly unacceptable** not just for the National Trust but for the majority of heritage sector organisations
- 3. An acceptable long-term solution remains in our grasp** – the Trust either supports a bored tunnel at least 2.9km long, or an over- ground solution which does minimal damage to the World Heritage Site. These would deal with the transport issues and at the same time ensure that the integrity of the landscape, including its archaeological and natural features, are conserved
- 4. Any immediate action should be with the aim of improving the immediate surroundings of Stonehenge and avoid compromising a long term solution** – the Trust proposes closure of the A344 and other traffic management solutions.

Sir William Proby, The National Trust’s Chairman, said: “If the Government believes the nation cannot afford to do the right thing for Stonehenge today, then we must ensure that nothing is done to prevent a future Government from treating the site with the respect and care that it so obviously demands.”

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**For further information:**

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**Notes to Editors:**

After the completion of a public inquiry last summer, whose Inspector recommended a 2.1km tunnel, the government indicated that rising costs meant this was too costly a solution. Instead, it sought a further round of consultation with a wide range of professional and local opinion on how to address the roads and transport issues at Stonehenge. These centre on the future of the principal A303 road that currently runs close to the Stones and the A344, that passes them on the northern side.

The Trust – custodian of some 850 hectares of land around the Stones - has collaborated closely with this consultation process but remains insistent that,

in order to preserve the integrity of the whole site – the Stones and their setting – the absolute minimum requirement is a tunnel of not less than 2.9km. It is often little understood that the Stonehenge landscape is far more extensive than first meets the eye. Indeed, the wider World Heritage Site – no less than 2,200hectares – is ever more significant as it continues to produce new and important archaeological discoveries.

The proposed 2.1km tunnel bisects ‘The Avenue’ a critically significant part of the ceremonial site.

Consultations were taken on five ‘options’ for the site. They included:

- A 2.1km tunnel for the A303 that would need to enter and exit the World Heritage Site on Trust land;
- A cut and cover tunnel;
- A northern route
- A southern route
- ‘Partial’ solutions involving substantial roads engineering at both the Longbarrow (west) and Countess (eastern) roundabouts.

None of these options were acceptable to The National Trust. The Trust believes that the Government should continue to explore bored tunnels of at least 2.9km and surface routes which do not impact significantly on the World Heritage Site.

Significant short term improvements to the site could be achieved by introducing modest traffic management measures at the western Longbarrow roundabout and accepting proposals to close the A344, grassing over the junction with the A303 – a traffic accident blackspot - proposals that we welcome.

Roads Minister Dr Stephen Ladyman MP is expected to publish the results of the A303 Stonehenge Improvement Scheme Review in the next few weeks.

The Trust understands that the minister may continue to reject the proposed 2.1km tunnel on grounds of cost but may instead propose alternative ‘partial solutions’ some of which could involve substantial spending on roads infrastructure which in turn are in danger of ‘building in’ long term obstacles to a satisfactory solution for the site.