

Saturday 01 July 2017

UNESCO NEEDS TO GET A LIFE

It would be good to applaud UNESCO's desire to protect the World Heritage Site around Stonehenge - but that would not be possible if you are one of thousands of people who actually live and work in the area.

UNESCO wants to influence the UK government into re-thinking the tunnel road scheme and moving it south and outside of the World Heritage Site (WHS). Such aim appears plausible until one realises that their preferred route imposes a far more damaging footprint by comparison to the current options. The impact on the Bourne, Woodford and Till valleys would be hugely detrimental. The result would lead to unacceptable levels of damage to the local environment, agricultural land, local communities and businesses, erosion of conservation areas, and irreparable damage to the fragile ecology. Their preferred route would cross the Avon and Till valleys – both designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) or Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Indeed Highways England state that UNESCO's preferred 'corridor F' would offer less of a direct route to the West Country and would deliver reduced transport and economic benefits to the local area. It would interact poorly with local roads and would increase rat-running through local villages. The result for nearby villages becomes worse access and more congestion.

Perhaps understandably for an organisation based in another country, UNESCO seems to have lost sight of the main objective set out by the government and Highways England to propose an improved transport solution to the West Country which eases congestion around Stonehenge and avoids rat-running around the villages. UNESCO's standpoint of '*not in my back yard*' gives no consideration for anything outside of WHS and ignores completely the views of local landowners who own a large part of the WHS property. Is their view as balanced as they claim?

UNESCO argue that the appearance of the WHS would be improved if it was rid of the A303 and allege that the proposed tunnel portals would have an adverse visual impact on Stonehenge. Yet both tunnel entrances would be out of sight of Stonehenge. Conversely, UNESCO seem happy to increase the size of existing coach and car parks which are already eyesores within the WHS. Finally the fact is conveniently forgotten that the path of the existing road past the stones has been a human right of way for thousands of years well before 1986 when Stonehenge was first added to the WHS list.

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In conclusion UNESCO's proposal ignores the basic premise for any improved highway and flouts the interests of local landowners and communities. Above all it continues to place the interests of the dead above those of the living and the need to preserve a unique countryside for future generations.

The Campaign for the Preservation of the Southern Till Valley, together with other local community groups, will continue to fight against any such ill-judged proposals.

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