Tourist numbers have greatest impact on lack of tranquillity at Stonehenge study finds

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Clive Bentley, acoustic scientist from consultancy Sharps Redmore, presented evidence today at a hearing into the planned £1.6 billion A303 Stonehenge Expressway project. His study found that rerouting traffic through a new 2-mile tunnel below the World Heritage site would have negligible impact on improving tranquillity and visitor experience at the site, contradicting key claims made by project sponsor, Highways England.

Bentley explained,

"*Highways England claims that removing and rerouting the A303 under the site would significantly improve tranquillity and people's experience of the Stone Circle. However, we found that it would have a negligible impact on reducing overall noise levels. Tranquillity at the Henge is greatly affected by the noise, behaviour and sheer number of visitors each day, rather than traffic adjacent to the site*."

According to Visit Britain Stonehenge is one the of UK's top 5 most visited paid attractions, reporting 1,582,532 visitors in 2017. Like many other UNESCO World Heritage sites, there is an ongoing tension between the need to generate high levels of funds to continue preservation and provide tourism infrastructure and maintaining a quality experience for those millions of visitors.

Kate Fielden, spokesperson for Stonehenge Alliance recalls her early visits to the site,

"*I remember picnicking at the Stone Circle with my family as a child and how peaceful it was. The visitor experience now is a world away from that. It's long queues with the constant din of audio guides and busloads of large tour groups. I'm sure it's fine for those just wishing to tick a box or pose for a photo, but for those seeking a deeper interaction with the site, the experience is rather lacking. Spending more than a billion pounds will not alter that and has the potential [under the current proposal] to seriously damage this historically-important landscape for future generations*. We*'d like to see the overall plan broadened to consider other option*s."

This week's hearing is considering the Development Consent Order (similar to planning permission for Nationally Important Infrastructure Projects) and hearing evidence from the applicant, Highways England, its experts, the Local Authorities, objectors and any other concerned parties. Ultimately the secretary of state for transport will decide by April 2020 whether the project is approved.

Clive Bentley on Sharps Redmore's involvement on behalf of the Stonehenge Alliance, "*Sharps Redmore is proud to be contributing to the deliberations process for one of the UK's most historically-significant and famous public places. We hope that our evidence will be used to encourage further exploration on the likely impacts on tranquillity and experience should the A303 Expressway project proceed*."

ENDS

Notes to Editors

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Specialist in environmental noise, dealing with planning, licensing, noise nuisance, rifle and shotgun noise, wind turbines and other sustainable technologies.

Clive has extensive expert witness experience at planning appeals, licensing hearings and other court work. He routinely writes technical noise assessment reports and noise and vibration chapters for Environmental Statements.

His work won the NAS Award for Innovation in Noise Control in 2009 and he has presented at and chaired conferences for Environmental Protection UK, the Institute of Acoustics and the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health.

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