

Highways England starts search to find archaeological specialists for A303 upgrade near Stonehenge

Following the selection of three bidders for the main works procurement, today marks the start of a four-month process to select a world class team of archaeological experts to undertake work, should planning consent be granted.

Highways England Project Director Derek Parody said:

The World Heritage Site around Stonehenge is a heritage site of national and international importance. We want to ensure that archaeological remains are preserved and recorded, in advance of scheme construction, by commissioning appropriate archaeological expertise.

Throughout this project we have been working closely with the country's heritage bodies and a Scientific Committee of eminent archaeological experts to ensure the scheme will conserve and enhance the World Heritage Site, and this will continue throughout the archaeological investigations and the construction process.

The procurement process in no way pre-empts the granting of a Development Consent Order and while we await the Secretary of State's decision, we need to progress the procurement to ensure the project is in the best position it can be in to proceed at pace thereafter.

Highways England's proposed £1.7 billion upgrade of the A303 between Amesbury and Berwick Down includes:

- 8 miles of free-flowing, high-quality dual carriageway
- a twin-bore tunnel 2 miles long underneath the World Heritage Site, closely following the existing A303 route, avoiding important archaeological sites, and avoiding intrusion on the view of the setting sun from the stones during the winter solstice
- a new bypass to the north of the village of Winterbourne Stoke, with a viaduct over the River Till valley
- new junctions with the A345 and A360 either side of the World Heritage Site

The scheme will unlock congestion along this vital A303 route, conserve and enhance the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Site and benefit the local and regional economy by providing skills and job opportunities for businesses large and small.

The process launched today relates to a £35 million contract. It will involve

documentation, site works, processing, laboratory work, reporting and dissemination, as well as archaeological evaluation and recording.

In the meantime, Highways England, the company responsible for the country's major A roads and motorways, is progressing the procurement process for the main works contract and is participating in dialogue with the three bidders over a six-month period before they submit their final tenders. The preferred bidder is expected to be announced in 2021.

Following a six-month Development Consent Order Examination last year, the Planning Inspectorate sent its report and recommendation to the Secretary of State for Transport and this will be published once a decision has been made.

The Transport Secretary recently announced a new deadline of 17 July for DCO decisions on Highways England's A303 Stonehenge, A303 Sparkford to Ilchester and A63 Castle Street projects.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.