

COUNCILLORS BRIEFING NOTE

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Service Area: Sustainable Transport

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Traffic in Vicinity of the New Stonehenge Visitors Centre

This note is intended as an update for Parishes and Members regarding recent changes to roads near Stonehenge

It is acknowledged that there have been significant delays on the A303 this summer, and that these delays will have been affected to some degree by the closure of the A344 at Stonehenge Bottom.

The planning application for the new visitor centre proposal by English Heritage was supported by Wiltshire Council, but the stopping up of the A344 in the vicinity of Stonehenge was subject to an independent inquiry (arranged by the Department for Transport) following an application by English Heritage. Neither the Council nor the Highways Agency objected to the stopping up of the A344, but many others did; it was accepted that there would be a degree of additional delay on the A303. The Inquiry Inspector heard the objections to the road closure, but found the proposal to be acceptable, and approved the making of an Order to stop up a length of the A344.

Two roundabouts were constructed for different reasons. The A303/A360 Longbarrow junction was improved by the Highways Agency to provide capacity for the forecast flows on both routes through the junction. The A360/B3086/A344 junction was provided by English Heritage to accommodate the forecast flows at this junction, and to provide a safer form of junction for the future traffic flows.

We do not yet have data available to indicate the extent to which traffic flows on the A303 and local roads might have increased this year, but the Council understands that the July visitor numbers to Stonehenge were at a peak. This could be an indicator that A303 traffic levels have increased during the same period.

We have been aware that, in addition to the effects of traffic slowing to view the Stones, there was also an issue with drivers attempting to turn across the traffic stream to enter Byway 12, which passes close to the Stones. Action has been taken to address this latter problem, with traffic regulation orders being secured to prohibit right turning into and out of the byway at its A303 junction. It is hoped that this measure will be respected by drivers, including those whose satnav devices might otherwise have directed them onto the byway.

The Highways Agency is responsible for the traffic on the A303, and they are well aware of local concerns. Wiltshire Council will continue to work with the Highways Agency to find ways to mitigate the problems of delays on the A303 and the additional traffic on the alternative local routes.

Next Steps

The traffic situation is anticipated to stabilise over the months following the opening of the new visitor centre, when an objective assessment can be made in relation to necessary actions. These are expected to include monitoring, and, if necessary, address the anticipated impact of vehicles on Byway 12, and to make arrangements to collect some traffic data to assess the ongoing impacts on local communities.

Visitor numbers to Stonehenge will also be monitored so that before and after comparisons can be made. English Heritage intend to erect local fold-down signing to alert drivers who are not pre-booked not to enter the visitor centre on those days when visitor numbers are at their highest. This could lead to some issues on the local network.

We will continue to work with the DfT and Highways Agency to press for a resolution to the constraints on the A303 trunk road, particularly as it affects journey time reliability around Stonehenge.