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To: [A303 Stonehenge; shappsg@parliament.uk](#)
Cc: [Daniels, Marcia](#)
Subject: A303 Second consultation
Date: 31 July 2020 21:20:43

Dear sirs,

I write in response to the request for comments following the publication of a report claiming to have identified a large circular monument around Durrington Walls and the consequent pausing of the process of confirming plans for the A303 Tunnel scheme. This pause seems unwarranted given the nature of the claimed discoveries, and I enjoin all concerned to press ahead with the Tunnel Scheme undeterred. Many parties seem to forget that the project is not about building a new road in a World Heritage Site: the project all about taking a very busy road **out** of the WHS by undergrounding it.

The supposed pit circle around Durrington Walls is a long way north of the proposed tunnel works in a quite different sector of the landscape. It was found through geophysical survey as part of a very extensive and very detailed programme of work. Significantly, this work does not appear to have found any significant archaeological remains in the area of the proposed tunnel portals or land that will be impacted by the proposed works. This discovery around Durrington Walls is therefore an unnecessary distraction.

Interpreting geophysical survey data is a tricky business at the best of times as it reveals anomalies of all sorts and all periods. In this case there seems to be a scatter of large pit-like anomalies across the whole area surveyed, some of which have been picked out as being more significant than the others because it is thought that they form a ragged circle around a known monument. Finding what appear to be patterns is one thing, making interpretations of them quite another. In this case those involved seem to have headed straight for a bold archaeological interpretation without presenting analysis relating to, for example, geological conditions in relation to topography that can sometimes give rise to interesting-looking but wholly natural features. Sadly, the team involved do not have an unblemished record in this regard. In 2015 they loudly trumpeted the discovery of more than a hundred stones forming a C-shaped structure underneath the bank of Durrington Walls, ignoring it seems the results from excavations in the 1960s that found postholes on much the same line. As expected, ground-truthing revealed that the supposed stones were indeed postholes as expected (see: <https://www.archaeology.co.uk/articles/features/rethinking-durrington-walls-a-long-lost-monument-revealed.htm>).

In the case of the suggested Durrington pit circle it seems that Wessex Archaeology have previously excavated four of the pits as part of quite separate development-led projects in advance of works for the Ministry of Defence at Larkhill and Durrington. This work suggested that the features were natural solution hollows, although, as usual with such features, the upper fills had become compacted thereby trapping archaeological material in the accumulating matrix of soil and stone which here was mostly middle Bronze Age debris dated to about 1500 BC. Wessex Archaeology are a highly reputable archaeological contractor and have considerable experience working on the chalklands. They can, I sincerely believe, be trusted to recognize a natural feature when they encounter one. In fact the Stonehenge landscape is littered with natural features of one sort or another. There is thus a tension between the interpretations

offered on the basis of the geophysical surveys and limited coring on the one hand, and carefully executed excavation on the other. The excavated evidence should here be given preference. It also clearly indicates that the fills of these features are mainly Bronze Age in date, and that accords with what we know of pit circles elsewhere. The rather blurred boundaries between natural and humanly-made features is not unexpected, and while it may seem odd to us here in the twenty-first century it is a feature of many archaeological contexts relating to the third and second millennia BC.

I have published a short commentary on the Durrington Pit Circle elsewhere (<https://www.apollo-magazine.com/neolithic-pits-durrington-discovery-near-stonehenge/>) and debates on it in the archaeological world may go on for some time, but the purpose of this representation is encourage all concerned to keep their eye on the goal, get the A303 tunnel built as quickly as possible, and not allow the process to be distracted by exaggerated claims of significant discoveries a long way north of the A303 corridor.

Yours sincerely,

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The Prehistory Guys: <https://theprehistoryguys.uk/output/podcast-25-professor-tim-darvill-stonehenge-bluestones-amp-barrows>

Digital Digging: <http://www.digitaldigging.net/grave-goods-tim-darvill/>

For the Stonehenge Sarsens story see:

<https://stories.bournemouth.ac.uk/stonehenge/index.html>

<https://theconversation.com/stonehenge-how-we-revealed-the-original-source-of-the-biggest-stones-143564>

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