

National Trust statement from their web site 25 May 2005

Hindhead planning inquiry begins

The National Trust - which owns and manages the Hindhead Commons on behalf of the nation - welcomes the start of the public inquiry into the Highways Agency's A3 Hindhead Scheme and regards this as a once in a lifetime opportunity to find a solution to the traffic problems that for decades have blighted the Hindhead area.

During the Inquiry the Trust will be looking to maximise the Scheme's potential to resolve the worst of the area's traffic problems and to deliver major recreational and environmental benefits in and around Hindhead Commons - one of the largest, most dramatic and most highly designated landscapes managed by the Trust in the South of England.

The Commons represent an exceptionally high quality survival of the once extensive heathland of this area - a landscape that is now among the most fragile in Europe - and its outstanding importance was acknowledged by the Highways Agency when the tunnel proposal was announced. Since 2002 - in a process known as Early Contractor Involvement (ECI) - the Trust has worked closely with the Highways Agency Project Team and the nominated contractors, Balfour Beatty, to help refine the Scheme and maximise its environmental and recreational benefits.

Through this work, the Scheme has been progressively developed and significant improvements have been made. The National Trust strongly supports the following aspects of the Scheme now being presented to the Inquiry:

- i Under the Scheme, the existing A3 around the Devil's Punch Bowl would be removed and restored to heathland and woodland, providing substantial recreation, nature conservation and landscape benefits. The removal of the A3 in this area would enable Hindhead Common and the Devil's Punch Bowl to be re-united, creating a landscape free from traffic and fitting its status as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- ii The Old Portsmouth Road around the Devil's Punch Bowl would be downgraded from a BOAT to a Bridleway to enhance tranquil cycle, bridle and footpath access and prevent rat running and damage by vehicles to the Commons
- iii The landscape impact of the Scheme at the northern end has been reduced substantially with the removal of the Boundless Road junction and replacement with a new Boundless Road underpass
- iv A new green bridge to carry Miss James Walk in Tyndall's Wood would be provided giving access to cyclists, horse riders and wildlife as well as walkers.

Following detailed work by the Highways Agency, the Trust has accepted that a longer tunnel through Tyndall's Valley is not a viable option. The Trust remains concerned that every effort now be made within the Published Scheme to minimise the environmental impact of the western arm of the proposed A3 tunnel on Tyndall's Wood and Tyndall's Valley and will continue to work with the Highways Agency to fine tune the Scheme in this and other areas. In this context the Trust is proposing that the Scheme should connect Tyndalls Wood to Hindhead Common through an underpass rather than through a road crossing point.

The Trust maintains its objections to the Compulsory Purchase Orders until the Secretary of State announces the final Scheme that will be built.

The Trust believes that the Published Scheme offers the best achievable solution to the traffic problems that have blighted Hindhead for decades. It promises to deliver very significant landscape and access improvements by uniting Hindhead Common and the Devil's Punch Bowl, and offers huge opportunities to enhance and revitalise the wider environment and community. The Trust will continue to work with the Highways Agency and other organisations to ensure that the potential benefits to the community and the environment from the Scheme are realised to the fullest possible extent.