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Reference

2017B-009

Date 28 February 2017

Subject: Progress on A8-A9 Link Road in relation to Defence Line of Amsterdam
World Heritage Site

Dear Dr Rössler, *dear Mechtild,*

On 8 October 2015, I informed you about the proposal to create a more effective link between the Netherlands' A8 and A9 motorways (ref. 2015B-25). That link has a potential impact on the Defence Line of Amsterdam World Heritage Site. On 20 November 2015, we received your letter in response (ref. CLT/HER/WHC/8419/NL/MA/MR), enclosing the "Technical Review by the Advisory Body ICOMOS regarding construction plans within the Defence Line of Amsterdam"; a number of recommendations were included regarding the planning procedure to be followed. I sent you an initial response and an update on the progress of the decision-making process on 9 May 2016 (ref. 2016B-008). The next milestone is now in sight: at the end of May, the Provincial Executive of Noord-Holland intends adopting a decision on a preferred route. The present letter is to inform you – as announced in my letter of 9 May 2016 – on the progress of the A8-A9 Link Road project and on how we have dealt with the recommendations by ICOMOS.

We have taken to heart the recommendations in the Technical Review by ICOMOS regarding the Link Road. In the enclosed report entitled "A8-A9 Highway Link. Spatial Impact of the three route alternatives on the Defence Line of Amsterdam", we indicate – by means of the visualisations requested by ICOMOS – the spatial effects of the three alternatives noted as being promising by the Provincial Executive of Noord-Holland, and which have been investigated further.

The visualisations also include spatial developments that have occurred from the point when the Defence Line of Amsterdam was included on the World Heritage List up to the present. In a number of cases, the decision-making regarding those developments had already taken place before the Defence Line of Amsterdam was included in the World Heritage List in 1996.

I elaborated in length on that matter in my letter of 27 January 2017 (ref. 2017B-005) concerning the proposal for a minor modification to the boundary of the Defence Line of Amsterdam, and it is also dealt with in the enclosure of the present letter.

Procedure and current situation regarding A8-A9 Link Road

The A8-A9 Link Road project was initiated in order to improve the link between the A8 and A9 motorways. The current link is unable to handle the amount of traffic, resulting in poor traffic flow and a negative impact on the quality of life in the area. A study of possible solutions showed that there were a number of promising alternatives.

In the first half of 2016, the Provincial Executive of the Province of Noord-Holland decided not yet to select a preferred alternative but to first work out three alternatives, namely the Zero Plus alternative (2), the Heemskerk alternative (5), and the Golf Course alternative (3). My letter of 9 May 2016 referred only to alternatives 2 and 5. Alternative 3 has been added, partly at the request of the Environmental Impact Assessment Committee. From the summer of 2016 on, the A8-A9 Link Road Project Team has been elaborating these three alternatives.

We share ICOMOS' wish for proper substantiation and a better understanding of the visual effects of developments. To that end a design process was set in motion so as to arrive at an integrated and unambiguous design for each alternative taking into account the many interests involved in the planning area. That design process has now been completed. Design variants have been investigated and tested for various route sections. Account has been taken of the project's dual objective of accessibility and quality of life and matters have been assessed according to the criteria of the Environmental Impact Assessment.

The preferred designs have been drawn up with input from numerous parties. The project organisation opened an office in the planning area for seven weeks in the autumn of 2016 where residents and the cooperating parties (including the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands and the Defence Line of Amsterdam programme office as site holder) could contribute their ideas and concerns. There were discussions with stakeholders. And organisations and local residents had the opportunity, during weekly walk-in evenings, to follow the design process, to contribute ideas and to suggest design proposals. That open planning process has created a great deal of support for the designs that are now available. Designs for which there was no support have been discarded.

The designs for the three preferred alternatives were submitted to the Provincial Executive of Noord-Holland in January 2017 for its decision. Those designs form the basis for the Environmental Impact Assessment. The HIA for the A8-A9 Link Road that was already drawn up and sent to you will form part of that Environmental Impact Assessment.

The schedule envisages a choice being made and a preferred alternative adopted in May 2017. The purpose of the present notification is to give you the opportunity to comment on the investigation

of the spatial effects of the three alternatives before the Provincial Executive adopts the provisional preferred alternative. The statutory public consultation will commence after the provisional preferred alternative has been adopted. During this period we will inform you about the choice that is made and the arguments in support of it. The final preferred alternative is expected to be adopted in December 2017 taking into account all the comments made. In the subsequent planning phase the preferred alternative that has been adopted will be designed in greater detail and the various statutory procedures will be followed.

The designs for the three alternatives, including visualisations, can be found in the enclosure.

Further clarification, response to recommendations by ICOMOS and World Heritage Centre

A number of recommendations for the A8-A9 Link Road were made in the Technical Review by ICOMOS in November 2015. An initial response to those recommendations was given in my aforementioned letter of 9 May 2016. We are pleased to read in the Technical Review that ICOMOS considers the social and economic need for improving the transport network in the north-western part of the Defence Line of Amsterdam to be of great importance. The Technical Review rightly observes that a sustainable final choice must be made that is appropriate to the World Heritage Site. We endorse that position wholeheartedly.

i: visual impact and landscape analysis

In addition to the HIA the ICOMOS Technical Review requests a visualisation of the visual impact of the proposed solutions for the A8-A9 Link Road. For that purpose a landscape analysis of the area is considered necessary, including all the existing visible phenomena that may compromise the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the Defence Line of Amsterdam. It is suggested that the main axis of view in this section of the WH property should be defined for the purpose of this landscape analysis.

ICOMOS also notes that spatial developments – both within and outside the boundaries of the World Heritage Site – that have taken place since 1996 and the present must be clarified. These include urbanisation in Heemskerk, the A9 motorway, the railway line and the wind turbine in Heemskerk.

Response: The report "A8-A9 Highway Link. Spatial impact of the three route alternatives on the Defence Line of Amsterdam" (enclosed in this letter) includes visualisations that provide an impression of the current situation in the area and the extent to which different urban elements and infrastructure facilities that may affect the OUV of the Defence Line of Amsterdam UNESCO World Heritage Site have been constructed. Developments around farms have also been indicated. Strengthening the agricultural function of the area is considered to be a strong economic counterweight against further urbanisation and has therefore been permitted. Visualisations are

also included for the three alternatives for linking the A8 and the A9 as they are now available, in relation to said World Heritage values.

Where determining the main axis of view is concerned, it should be noted that the DLA is in essence a military defence system. The main axis of view is that of the defender in the direction of the assumed attacker. In this section of the WH property it is therefore from the main defence line on the inside of the ring towards the outside to the west. The three alternatives for linking the A8 and the A9 all therefore run more or less parallel to the main axis of view.

ii: maintenance of integrity and authenticity and contribution to the quality of life

A central issue in the Technical Review by ICOMOS concerns the maintenance of the integrity and authenticity of tangible attributes. ICOMOS would welcome confirmation that these elements are in a good state of conservation and that there will be no alteration to the continuity of the technical features of the defence system in this zone.

ICOMOS states that greater clarity is needed as to how the OUV is expressed. ICOMOS also deals with the quality of life in the area, in order to enable the population to benefit sustainably from the value of the Defence Line of Amsterdam.

Response: As regards the remark by ICOMOS that greater clarity is needed as to how the OUV is expressed, we wish to note that in principle all the tangible attributes (forts, dikes, canals, and other military and hydraulic elements) and the immaterial attribute of "openness of the landscape" give expression to the OUV of the Defence Line and must therefore be preserved. The possible effects on all these attributes have therefore been included in the HIA and the visualisations.

It is apparent from the three design alternatives for the A8-A9 Link Road that a certain impact on the openness of the landscape cannot always be prevented. However, technical solutions to minimise the impact or mitigating measures to compensate for the impact have been proposed in the designs. In all the alternatives, a negative impact on the integrity and authenticity of the tangible attributes and the continuity of the line as a whole has been avoided.

The state of conservation of these tangible attributes was already dealt with in detail in the response dated 9 May 2016. All the attributes belonging to the Defence Line of Amsterdam have been mapped and described. The attributes can be consulted in greater detail via <http://tinyurl.com/defencelineofamsterdam>.

The designs that we are submitting pay ample attention to recreational access to the area, especially for cyclists and walkers. We consider it important for the area to remain attractive for residents and recreational users. Where possible, we wish to strengthen the utilisation value of the Defence Line of Amsterdam UNESCO World Heritage Site by ensuring that the dikes associated with it continue to be suitable for recreation or are made so. Although the planned A8-A9 Link Road cuts through the Defence Line of Amsterdam World Defence Site, an important aspect of the planning process is to preserve the tangible attributes of the World Heritage Site, such as the forts, dikes and water-management elements, and where necessary also to restore them, so that

the strategic landscape remains comprehensible and perceptible for visitors to the area. That aim can count on great support within the region.

iii: sustainability of least impacting solution

Another recommendation by ICOMOS was to investigate whether alternative 7 – the seemingly least impacting solution for the cultural heritage - provides a sustainable solution to the traffic problems.

Response: The investigations that have been carried out have shown that alternative 7 does not provide a sustainable solution. Alternative 7 affects a sensitive natural area (De Ham and Crommenije), causes serious nuisance for the planned Kreekrijk residential neighbourhood, and has a negative cost-benefit ratio. Alternative 7 is therefore no longer one of the alternatives to be explored; an administrative decision to that effect was adopted in 2016.

iv: examine a buffer zone

Finally, ICOMOS recommends examining “the possibility of defining a buffer zone to avoid visual impacts in places where forts and dikes are close to the property’s boundaries”.

Response: That recommendation goes beyond the scope of this case study, given that it involves consequences for the boundaries of the entire Defence Line of Amsterdam. That recommendation is therefore not addressed in this context; it was addressed, however, in the proposal submitted earlier this year for a minor modification to the boundary of the Defence Line of Amsterdam World Heritage Site.

Request

The Dutch Government and the Province of Noord-Holland attach great importance to careful consideration and decision-making regarding the A8-A9 Link Road. That is why we are providing you with the information regarding the procedure, the progress, and the designs and visualisations as comprised in the enclosure with this letter.

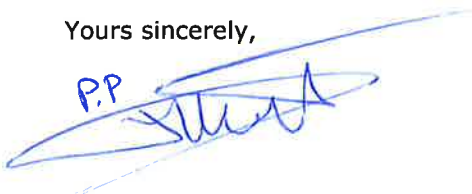
The enclosure provides further clarification of the outcomes of the design process and the visual effects on the Defence Line of Amsterdam. It is not yet known which alternative is most favourable. We must first wait for the Environmental Impact Assessment to be completed. That assessment weighs up various interests regarding the environment, including the importance of the UNESCO World Heritage Site.

We hope that the information we are providing will allow you gain a good impression of the effects on the Defence Line of Amsterdam UNESCO World Heritage Site of the three alternative routes for the new A8-A9 Link Road. We look forward to receiving your response regarding the three designs

that have been drawn up. The Provincial Executive of Noord-Holland will attach great importance to UNESCO's opinion when selecting a preferred alternative.

The Provincial Executive intends taking a decision on this matter on 23 May 2017 and would therefore greatly appreciate receiving your response in week 14 of 2017. Preparations for decision-making by the Provincial Executive will commence in that week.

Yours sincerely,



Lionel Veer

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary,
Permanent Delegate of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to UNESCO

Enclosure:

"A8-A9 Highway Link. Spatial impact of the three route alternatives on the Defence Line of Amsterdam"

cc:

- ICOMOS Int.
- National UNESCO Commission
- Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands