



Kingdom of the Netherlands

World Heritage Centre
Mechtild Rössler, director
7 Place de Fontenoy
75352 PARIS 07 SP
FRANCE

**Permanent Delegation of the
Kingdom of the Netherlands
to UNESCO**

7 rue Eblé
75007 Paris
France

Contact

Eunice den Hoedt

T 01 40 62 33 88

pau@minbuza.nl

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Subject: Proposed A8-A9 highway link, Defence Line of Amsterdam

Dear Ms Rössler,

We are writing to inform you of the progress made with the plans concerning the proposed A8-A9 highway link in the north-western part of the Defence Line of Amsterdam. The reason for this letter is the recently-taken decision by the Minister of Culture and the Provincial Executive of Noord-Holland to draw up an Integrated Landscape Plan for this part of the Defence Line of Amsterdam, including a detailed elaboration of one of the highway alternatives, the 'Golf course option'. The Province deems it important that a solution be found for the issues of the quality of life and accessibility of the area between the A8 and A9 highways. At the same time, the Province considers it absolutely essential that the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the UNESCO World Heritage Site Defence Line of Amsterdam is preserved and improved. The parties entrusted with drawing up the landscape plan and the detailed elaboration of the chosen option must attempt to find a suitable and broadly-accepted integrated solution for these conflicting interests.

The objective of this letter is to notify you of the progress in the planning and the way in which the recommendations in ICOMOS' report 'Proposed Highway Link A8/A9' dated November 2017 will be dealt with. This report was drawn up based on ICOMOS' Advisory Mission in October 2017. Once the Integrated Landscape Plan has been drawn up and the preferred option elaborated, we will notify you accordingly.

This letter does not discuss ICOMOS' recommendations concerning the setting up of a buffer zone and a strategic approach for the property as a whole. These sections of ICOMOS' report will be discussed extensively in the significant boundary modification of the Defence Line of Amsterdam, which entails a considerable extension of the World Heritage Site with the New Dutch Waterline and some minor modifications of the Defence Line of Amsterdam itself.

ICOMOS' advisory mission and recommendations, November 2017

ICOMOS' report, with the findings of the Advisory Mission, was received in November 2017. In the report, ICOMOS concludes that it is unable to support any of the options at the present time. Its advice was to search for further options that meet the most important criteria, i.e. quality of life, mobility and preservation of the OUV. In addition, ICOMOS gives the following recommendations in its report:

“First, the mission considers that the possibility of a buffer zone needs to be examined, at least for the most sensitive parts of the property’s components, based on a clear definition of the setting of the property.

Secondly, remedial work is needed for some areas of landscape as touched on in this report.

Thirdly, the mission suggests that in response to these issues, more detailed strategic approaches need to be developed for the property as a whole and its wider setting, particularly in relation to infrastructure (...).”

The first and third recommendations regarding the setting up of a buffer zone and a more detailed strategic approach for the property as a whole pertain to the broader context of the Defence Line of Amsterdam in its entirety. These recommendations will be incorporated when drawing up the nomination dossier for the addition of the New Dutch Waterline to the Defence Line of Amsterdam, which the province of Noord-Holland is currently working on with the provinces of Utrecht, Gelderland and Noord-Brabant. The parties involved expect to be able to submit this dossier in January 2019.

The second recommendation, concerning the integration and landscape restoration measures, is the immediate cause for drawing up an Integrated Landscape Plan for the area under consideration (see below).

Broader consideration of alternatives in response to ICOMOS' recommendations

The Minister of Culture and the Provincial Executive of Noord-Holland have jointly concluded that ICOMOS' recommendations dated November 2017 identify a complex situation as regards the urgent issues of quality of life, accessibility and preservation of the OUV of the area in question. They also conclude that ICOMOS' recommendations offer an opening not only to look for alternative options for the A8 – A9 link but also to examine other measures that can help realize the objectives of quality of life, mobility and preservation of the OUV.

In response to ICOMOS' recommendations, the planning process that had taken place was re-examined. The question was asked whether there were any new insights that have given rise to the consideration or reconsideration of other options or alternatives. The methodology customarily used in decision-making regarding spatial measures in the Netherlands had already been used in earlier phases of the planning. This methodology first looks at the social need for a proposed measure, secondly at alternatives for the problem identified (transport alternatives such as a change in mobility management, enhancing public transport and/or better utilization of existing infrastructure), thirdly at site alternatives and lastly at integration and design variants (including compensatory measures), before deciding on the construction of new infrastructure. We have to conclude that none of the transport options examined and named contribute sufficiently to a solution for the quality of life and mobility problems.

The review also shows that no new route alternatives are possible for the highway link apart from those already considered. Earlier reports have already indicated, with supporting arguments, that the route alternatives examined that have less impact on the OUV of the Defence Line of Amsterdam are not possible and/or score significantly worse in the fields of quality of life and/or mobility. We again ascertained that there is no alternative for the Golf course or the Heemskerk options.

We subsequently looked for measures that could be taken along with the Golf course or Heemskerk options to solve the quality of life and accessibility issues and also explicitly preserve and, where possible, reinforce the OUV of the Defence Line of Amsterdam.

The Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) carried out for seven alternative routes and submitted to UNESCO in 2015 scored both the Golf course and the Heemskerk options as 'moderately negative'. After the HIA was drawn up, further adjustments were made to the landscaping because they were necessary for traffic engineering reasons. It subsequently became apparent that the Heemskerk option had more impact on the landscape and the OUV than the Golf course option. Additional measures would be necessary to limit its impact on the OUV. Given its location in this part of the Defence Line of Amsterdam, the Golf course option provides the best chance for the restoration of the landscape expression of the Defence Line of Amsterdam. This is partly why the Golf course option was opted for as the most feasible solution. Whether and how this route can be integrated in the World Heritage site is now being examined.

Landscape Plan and the preferred option

As a result of ICOMOS' recommendations and the review sketched above, the Minister of Culture and the Provincial Executive of Noord-Holland decided on 25 April 2018 first to draw up an Integrated Landscape Plan as an intermediate step to the decision-making process. ICOMOS' recommendations of November 2017 are a guiding framework for the Landscape Plan to be drawn up. The Landscape Plan concerns the entire area under consideration where the A8-A9 highway link crosses the Defence Line of Amsterdam. It takes the preservation and restoration of the integrity and authenticity of the landscape of the Defence Line as the starting point, the new highway link being integrated as well as possible. The Landscape Plan must, on the one hand, lead to concrete measures for the restoration of the landscape of the Defence Line of Amsterdam and, on the other, to basic principles for the design of the highway. Above all, the Landscape Plan serves to restore the visual cohesion between the separate defensive structures and combat the fragmentation of the landscape, the objective being to preserve the integrity of the property and legibility of the defensive landscape. Virtual images and visual studies into the effects of the various measures (both of current disturbing factors and planned measures) can support this, as indicated by ICOMOS.

The Landscape Plan will be drawn up by a reputable landscape architecture bureau. The Province of Noord-Holland will be the commissioning authority and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science's Cultural Heritage Agency and the Cultural Heritage and Arts department will have important advisory roles. The Board of Government Advisors will also have a role in the drawing up the Landscape Plan. This board of three renowned architects and landscape architects, who advise the government on request and at their own initiative on large infrastructure and construction challenges, has already given its recommendations on the design of alternatives in the feasibility study phase.

Subsequently, on 29 May 2018 the Provincial Executive designated a preferred route alternative for the link road: the Golf course option. By opting for the Golf course option, the provincial authorities of Noord-Holland indicate that this route, an indicative line on the map, is the preferred alternative. The design of the highway and its integration in the landscape will be elaborated in the Landscape Plan. The choice of the Golf course option as the preferred route is not an irreversible decision. The Landscape Plan, including the design of the preferred route, is an important intermediate step in the

process of arriving at a suitable and acceptable link between the A8 and the A9 in a delicate landscape.

The Province and the Minister of Culture will assess the definitive Integrated Landscape Plan. The central question in this assessment will be whether the integrated highway link and the additional measures for restoring the landscape will achieve the three objectives of improving quality of life, improving the accessibility of the area and at the same time preserving the OUV of the Defence Line of Amsterdam. Social cost considerations will also play an important role here.

Follow-up planning process

Now that the decisions on the preferred option and the Landscape Plan have been taken, the drawing up of the latter will start in the autumn of 2018. The Landscape Plan will serve as the basis for the more detailed elaboration and integration of the Golf course option and will also have to answer the question of how ICOMOS' recommendations will be implemented.

The Provincial Executive and Provincial States of Noord-Holland and the Minister of Culture are (separately) expected to assess whether the Landscape Plan provides sufficient possibilities for a feasible and acceptable design for the A8-A9 highway link in the autumn of 2019. There will then be a go/no-go point in the planning process, and the decision will be made whether to proceed with the plans for the construction of the highway link. We will notify you of the decision made. If possible, this will take place simultaneously with ICOMOS' technical evaluation mission for the significant boundary modification of the Defence Line of Amsterdam, so that the plans and proposed measures can be assessed in the field.

We hope that we have provided you with sufficient information for the moment and, finally, would like to assure you that we take ICOMOS' recommendations seriously and intend to incorporate them into the further procedures.

Yours sincerely,

Hans Wesseling,
Ambassador

Permanent Delegate of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to UNESCO



C.c.:

- ICOMOS International, Paris
- Provincial Executive of Noord-Holland, Haarlem
- Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Cultural Heritage and Arts department
- Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands
- Netherlands National Commission for UNESCO