

Countryside Update

March 2008 (issue 79)

Ecotowns a step closer

Since taking over as the Minister of State for Housing on 24th January this year, the Rt Hon Caroline Flint MP has nailed her colours to the mast of ecotowns development, taking the concept forward as a priority of the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG).

Initially, nearly 60 bids were registered with the Government which have been assessed against criteria set out in the Ecotowns Prospectus (available at www.communities.gov.uk then enter a search for 'eco-towns prospectus'). These include transport, land use and the infrastructure needed to make the development both deliverable and sustainable.

The RA attended a meeting with Ms Flint MP and chaired by the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA. A charity that campaigns for planning based on accessibility, sustainability, diversity and community cohesion). Here, the Minister maintained that ecotowns will be subject to widespread local consultation and will need to acknowledge the new development plan system.

It's difficult to gauge whether and to what extent the proposals could threaten the countryside at this stage. Further announcements are due soon as the short listing process continues.

South Downs National Park latest

The public inquiry into the confirmation of the proposed South Downs National Park re-opened on the 12th February in Worthing. The Ramblers' Association joined a group of protestors coordinated by the South Downs Campaign to call for the inclusion of the area known as the Western Weald, which the inspector currently recommends should not be part of the national park – an area approximately the size of the Isle of White and almost one quarter of the originally proposed park!

We have supported the strong case made by the South Downs Campaign to keep this exceptional landscape inside the national park. The latest news on the public inquiry is available at

www.southdownscampaign.org.uk.

Final government confirmation of the South Downs National Park should be announced around the autumn this year.

TAKE ACTION:

Support the RA Hampshire Group by attending its demonstration in the precinct at Winchester on Friday 4th April at 10am

Also, sign the online petition at <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/western-weald/> – and encourage others to do the same.

Circular Number: 08/23 **Date:** April 2008 **For:** Information and Action

To: Area and Group Countryside Secretaries; Area Secretaries; Countryside Update members; Extra Countryside Secretaries
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Help the Ramblers to 'stop climate chaos'

The Ramblers are members of Stop Climate Chaos, the coalition of over 70 organisations calling for a strong Climate Change Bill. Our efforts have led to the Government introducing a Climate Change Bill and it is now in its final stages in Parliament and set to be law by the summer. It will be a world leading piece of legislation, giving the Government legally binding emissions reduction targets.

However, the Bill is critically flawed and needs to be strengthened in the following 2 ways:

1. The 2050 emissions reduction target must be at least 80% (currently it is 60%)
2. International aviation and shipping emissions must be included in the targets

TAKE ACTION:

1. Write to your MP asking them to sign Early Day Motion 736 which supports these changes to the Bill, and
2. Urge others (friends, family, neighbours, colleagues etc) to write to their MPs too - the more letters they receive the better.

For more information visit the Stop Climate Chaos website - www.stopclimatechaos.org

Countryside Guidance Notes update

Thank you for your patience with the late arrival of the new and improved Countryside Guidance Notes (due to staff changes). The notes are with the printers as we speak, should be back with us in the coming weeks and will be sent out immediately on their arrival to central office. Prior to the hard copies reaching you, an electronic version is available on our website at

<http://www.ramblers.org.uk/countryside/>

If you have any news items that you would like to see appearing in the Countryside Update, please do send them in to david.murray@ramblers.org.uk.

Also, if you would like to discuss specific countryside protection issues affecting your area or group, please do not hesitate to contact me on 0207 339 8586 or on the email address above.

Glyndebourne Wind Turbine Controversy

Glyndebourne Opera House is proposing to build a giant wind turbine on a hillside in the South Downs above the village of Ringmer near Lewes. The Opera House claims the 230 foot/70 meter turbine will help it to reduce its production of greenhouse gases and global warming. But local and national conservation groups are joining forces with local residents to oppose the scheme which will arguably cause disproportionate environmental damage.

With a height equivalent to 24 storey skyscraper, local people are very concerned about the prospect of this enormous construction in the highly sensitive Downland landscape.

The proposal also raises important national issues because it would be the largest turbine in any National Park in England once the Park comes into being.

The Ramblers' Association attended the opening day of the 6 day public inquiry and added its voice to the demonstration outside the White Hart pub in Lewes (the inquiry venue) that same morning.

We joined forces with the Campaign to Protect Rural England, the Council for National Parks the Open Spaces Society and the South Downs Society to present our evidence to the inquiry which included the impact on tranquillity, noise pollution issues and the effects on walkers using footpaths running within meters of the proposed site and from parts of the South Downs Way National Trail.

If you are interested in reading more on the Ramblers' Association policy on renewable energy and wind farms, please visit www.ramblers.org.uk/countryside/energy/