

# Countryside Update

Issue no. 44: July 2003

## National Walking Strategy Launched

After many promises the government has finally launched its national walking strategy – of sorts. The document, entitled *On the move: by foot* is a discussion document, rehashing ideas that were raised in a series of seminars last year. It was thought that the work from the seminars would lead to a full policy document.

The document received minimal publicity when it was launched, the Department for Transport deciding against launching it at the annual walking conference on the 4<sup>th</sup> July. It indicates that the Department is still worried about attracting a “Ministry for Silly Walks” tag if it gives the strategy the prominence it deserves.

*On the move: by foot* is available from the Department for Transport’s website [www.dft.gov.uk](http://www.dft.gov.uk). The Ramblers’ Association will be responding nationally and would welcome your views on the paper, or you can submit your own response. The deadline for responses is 26<sup>th</sup> September 2003.

You can help by writing to your MP and asking them if they have read the document and asking them if they support it. Ask them to forward your letter on to the Minister of Transport on your behalf.

You could also write to your local councillors, as they will be ultimately responsible for implementing much of the strategy. The

Government has said it hopes to produce a final strategy by the end of the year.

## Andrew Bennett calls debate on National Walking Strategy

Following the publication of *On the move: by foot* Andrew Bennett MP, Ramblers’ Association Vice President, held a debate in Westminster about the document with Tony McNulty, the junior transport minister.

Andrew raised many important points about the importance of walking, saying:

“The Government should be hailing how enjoyable walking is, in the countryside and the urban setting”

He explained how disappointed he was in the publication and explained how important it was for a proper strategy to be released. Unfortunately, although asked for a date of release, the minister was unable to give a firm answer.

## Parliamentary Update

June saw a cabinet reshuffle, which contained both good and bad news for the Ramblers.

The biggest changes were in the Department for Transport (DfT), which saw the departure of John Spellar much to the delight of many transport pressure groups. Tony McNulty and Kim Howells are joining the DfT. Kim Howells will take responsibility for walking and cycling among other duties. David Jamieson is remaining in the department and will take responsibility for roads

Circular no. Date From	03/48*** July 2003 Ramblers' Association Countryside Protection Team – Central Office Sarah Williams – Tel 020 7339 8571 Email <a href="mailto:sarahw@london.ramblers.org.uk">sarahw@london.ramblers.org.uk</a> Emily Richmond - Tel: 020 7339 8541 Email <a href="mailto:emilyr@london.ramblers.org.uk">emilyr@london.ramblers.org.uk</a>  NB – Please contact Sarah if you would like to add others to the circulation list.	For To	Information Area and Group Countryside Officers Area and Group Secretaries Area Media Contacts England and Wales (Scotland for information only) Staff and EC Countryside Update members
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and road safety and Tony McNulty will take responsibility for aviation.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) also saw changes. Michael Meacher was removed, much to the disappointment of many environmental groups. He has been replaced by Elliot Morley. Elliot Morley was already working for DEFRA and the Ramblers' Association have worked well with him on some issues. Ben Bradshaw has joined DEFRA, he has responsibility for nature conservation, sites of special scientific interest and areas of outstanding natural beauty among others.

## **Royal Welsh Show 21-24 July, Builth Wells**

Ramblers in Wales share a stand with other organizations from the voluntary environmental sector under the banner of Wales Environment Link. The show offers a good opportunity for networking with other partners from Welsh Assembly Government, local government and national parks and other statutory and voluntary agencies.

Ramblers' in Wales will be launching a path problem form in partnership with the Forestry Commission as an initiative to see that all public rights of way on forest estates are in good order. The Environment, Planning and Countryside Minister, Carwyn Jones will attend our stand on 24 July to give this initiative his support.

## **Holiday village in west Wales**

The £45m Bluestone Project, a development of holiday chalets and all-year-round tourist and leisure facilities on the edge of the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, has cleared its first planning hurdle through Pembrokeshire County Council. It is still to go to the National Park Authority where it is likely to face tougher opposition.

## **Pre-inquiry meeting for the South Downs**

The pre-public inquiry meeting for the proposed South Downs National Park took place on the 7<sup>th</sup> July in Worthing. The meeting was held to let members of the public know how the inquiry will progress, with dates and information on providing evidence. It was also an opportunity to meet the inspector and his team.

The meeting was well attended by both groups and individuals. There were a lot of questions asked about the procedure of the inquiry and who could attend. There were lots of supporters: it seemed as though most of the room were

supportive of the National Park, although members of the South Downs Campaign (of which The Ramblers' Association is a member) were incorrectly labelled as opposing a National Park by some local news sources. In fact we are opposing some of the boundaries, wanting to make the National Park bigger than the area currently being proposed!

The inquiry will begin on the 10<sup>th</sup> November 2003 and is supposed to end in July 2004. There are several locations where you can get further information about the procedure and proposed boundary. Please call Sarah if you would like to know more about this.

## **Results announced on Multi-Modal studies**

Alaistar Darling announced the long awaited results of the multi-modal studies, which were looking into ways to alleviate transport difficulties. The Ramblers' Association was unhappy that the results focused overwhelmingly on road building without placing emphasis on improving public transport links.

He announced £7 billion of road building programmes, many of which will go through beautiful areas of countryside. Some suggested improvements were halted because of environmental damage in areas of outstanding natural beauty, but others will continue. There is a silver lining for the South Downs as proposed bypasses and other road developments have been rejected.

With three out of ten households not having access to a car, it seems a shame that the results focus so heavily on a mode of transport which is unavailable to so many. In doing so the Department for Transport is making it more difficult for people to enjoy the countryside that do not normally have an opportunity to do so.

If you are unhappy with the proposals you can help by writing a letter to your MP and letting them know. This is particularly important if you live near an area, which will be affected. You could also write to your local newspaper expressing your views and try and get the issues debated. This has already received wide spread media coverage and it is likely to attract attention in the future. If you see an article you feel strongly about, write a letter or send an email to the newspaper.

If you would like other campaigning ideas, please call Sarah.