

Countryside Update

December 2003 (issue no. 48)

Roundup of the year

What a year it has been for the countryside. From the Government's 'Clear Skies' renewable energy initiative to increase small-scale renewables to its 'Muddy Skies' initiative to increase the number of planes zooming above us, we are more than feeling the turbulence! The Planning Bill, reported in February to have done its time in the House of Commons, is back there and not expected to receive royal assent until next April. In the meantime it continues to lope its way through debates worrying county councils and environmental organisations alike with its complicated and unsatisfactory suggestions for local planning.

In the proposed National Parks we all continue to hold our breath. The Inspector was due to announce his decision on the New Forest in late autumn, but as Countryside Update went to press nothing has yet been heard. Neither have we any news of the outcome of the Dibden Bay port development public inquiry which, if given the go ahead, will have serious negative impacts on the Forest. We've been working hard in the South Downs all year and I think most people involved heaved a sigh of relief when the public inquiry finally got under way in Worthing in November. It's due to go on for at least a year, so we're calling on readers in the South East to keep responding to negative articles in the local press.

At central office, the countryside team has been responding to the changing emphasis of the Association towards promoting walking by lobbying hard to get walking recognised by

Government and the wider population. We launched the exciting Walking Out project which ran successfully as a pilot in Ulverston in the spring and went on to receive Countryside Agency funding to take it forward in three more cities (Stoke, Lincoln and Sheffield). It's still in its early stages, so look out for updates in Countryside Update next year to find out how it's going.

This year has also seen major improvements to our website (www.ramblers.org.uk/countryside) in order to better equip you, our readers, to help us win campaigns. Emily and Sarah would like to thank all of our volunteers for your sterling support and work over the year. Please keep it up! There's a lot coming up in 2004, so do keep an eye on our website for ways in which you can continue to help us really make a difference. We wish you a very merry Christmas and a prosperous 2004.

Ramblers' Association campaign for greater safety on our roads

The Ramblers' Association is actively supporting Transport 2000 and the Slower Speeds Initiative in its campaign for better safety on the roads.

We are concerned about the increasing amount of bad publicity regarding speed cameras that has been in the media recently. We fully support speed cameras and other initiatives that aim to make the roads safer for pedestrians. Evidence shows that the number of pedestrians killed or seriously injured at camera sites has fallen by 56%. Hitting a pedestrian at 35 miles per hour is twice as likely to kill them as hitting them at 30 miles per hour.

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You can help by writing to Alastair Darling and asking for speed cameras and other safety initiatives in your area. You can also help by monitoring the media and writing to them about articles which are derisory of speed cameras.

There is more information on our website (www.ramblers.org.uk/countryside). If you don't have access to the Internet please contact Sarah for more information.

Aviation White Paper

It is expected that the Government's aviation White Paper will be published in mid-December, so will probably be out by the time you receive this newsletter.

The Ramblers' Association has been involved in the campaign for a more sustainable aviation policy and is calling for fairer taxation on aviation. which would not only bring £9 billion extra into the Government's purse, it would also probably negate the 'need' for expansion. Protecting the countryside means not concreting over large block of it to make space for runways, new roads and other infrastructure. Increased aviation capacity would also mean more air and noise pollution.

Government changes tack on a National Walking Strategy

Despite strong campaigning by the Ramblers' Association the Government has decided not to produce a National Walking Strategy but instead to include walking in a more general strategy for increasing the nation's physical activity.

The Department for Transport will be responsible for ensuring that the walking element is prominent in the strategy and we have been invited to discuss this with civil servants.

As part of the campaign we have joined forces with Living Streets, Transport 2000 and the London Walking Forum and put together a 12 point plan for the DfT to take forward.

The 12 point plan calls on the Department for Transport to actively review a number of important policy areas including driver liability for crashes with pedestrians and speed limits. It also calls for practical help with implementation such as training and a good website. For a copy of the 12 point plan please contact Emily at central office.

News from Wales

Countryside Guidance Notes

Each area in Wales now has a set of Planning Policy Documents Wales (PPGs) and a set of

Technical Advice Notes (TANs) relevant to the work of RA. In addition Countryside Guidance Notes revised for use in Wales have been sent to all Countryside Secretaries.

Country Code

After two years of discussion RA staff were disappointed to receive a copy of the Country Code for England and Wales. This document will not go out for general consultation and at present includes a five point visitor code and a very general statement for landowners and managers which does not meet the RAs expectations.

Motorised recreation on forest land

Several incidents have taken place where walkers and motorised recreationists have come into conflict on the forest estate. A number of meetings have now been set up with RA volunteers, unitary authority highway personnel and Forestry Commission staff to explore options for future management.

Wales Spatial Plan

Consultation meetings are taking place across Wales to examine the contents of this document which is a cross department policy integration tool. It will act in the same way as planning guidance.

For all readers in the West Midlands

The West Midlands Rural Development Service website has recently been launched. The website is an excellent source of information for developments in the England Rural Development Programme. Its address is www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/rds/wm.

The Rural Development Service has money available to spend locally on grants for diversification, marketing and training. They are running a series of informal workshops to explain the grants and how it apply for them. The workshops will be held in Worcester over the first half of 2004. For more information please contact Sarah at central office.



