

Countryside Update

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Victory over Dibden Bay!

Astonishment struck environmental campaigners all over the country after Easter when the Secretary of State announced the extraordinary news that the Dibden Bay proposal for the edge of the New Forest had been turned down. The public inquiry into Dibden Bay finished in 2002 and the Ramblers' Association, along with numerous other organisations and individuals worked hard on presenting evidence to the inquiry and making sure that the best case was put forward.

The site of Dibden Bay is in the proposed Countryside Agency's boundary for the New Forest National Park. It is also designated for its conservation importance and there was a strong coalition standing against the proposal. The Government decided that the economic interest did not outweigh the environmental damage it would cause.

Huge thanks go to the New Forest Group for all their and help. Many volunteers turned up at meetings and provided information, maps, statements and even came to the inquiry to lend their support. Particular thanks go to John Thackray, New Forest Group chair, Alan Shotter and the late Maurice Barker for giving evidence on behalf of the RA. The national/local coalition provided a strong case which has shown the power of shared campaigning.

It also bodes well for the designation of the New Forest National Park. We are campaigning for the park to be designated as soon as possible and believe it would make a wonderful announcement

for the first National Parks Week which runs from the 1st to the 9th of July.

You can help by writing to your MP or the Secretary of State for the Environment, Margaret Beckett, urging them to designate the New Forest National Park. When writing, don't forget to say how much you support the decision on Dibden Bay!

South Downs Update

The Ramblers' Association is continuing to give evidence at the Public Inquiry into the South Downs National Park. At the time of writing, we are about to give evidence for the inclusion of a section of land in the Adur Valley in Sussex near to Small Dole village. We will also be appearing in June to discuss a village in Hampshire called Rowlands Castle which we firmly believe should be included in the park.

We are also preparing papers on how we think the planning decisions for the South Downs should be administered and how some of the transport issues in the South Downs could be addressed. There is pressure at the moment from some of the local authorities within the South Downs which are promoting expensive and damaging road schemes as the way forward and we are strongly opposed to this. We do not believe that enough thought is being given to some of the public transport options that could help to relieve congestion in the area.

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Planning Bill Receives Royal Assent

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act received Royal Assent on the 13th May paving the way for 'a more flexible and responsive planning system' – so says the Government. While accepting that the Act is far less gloomy than the Planning Green Paper which Ramblers campaigned on in 2002, it removes the power from elected local government and places it in the hands of unelected regional assemblies. This is the key concern of the RA.

We have a lot of information to sift through, but over the next few months we shall be working to put together a briefing note and campaign guidance to help Areas, Groups and individual members to campaign effectively on the planning system (both forward planning and development control). We hope to coordinate this work with other local campaigning organisations such as CPRE and Friends of the Earth in order to help volunteers across the board to understand the system and to work together where possible.

Countryside Secretaries will soon be receiving updates to the Countryside Guidance Notes which should help with some of the broader changes bring you up to date with other planning issues.

Way to Go Campaign Update

The campaign to influence the Government's review of the 10 year transport plan continues and is gathering momentum.

Postcards are continuing to be sent in, but as always, if more can be sent in that would be a big bonus. We still have some postcards at central office and we would encourage anyone who has not sent one in to do so and to contact central office if you would like some more.

The campaign is working on a document entitled 'Paying for transport: costing the Way to Go manifesto'. This report looks at how much it would cost to implement the proposals being promoted by the campaign and how this compares with other solutions put forward to solve transport, such as widening existing roads or building new roads altogether. At the time of writing this is only available in draft form, but it should be available for circulation very soon. Please contact Sarah at central office if you would like a copy.

We have received quite a few photos of streets and pavements in bad condition, but we would still like some more! We intend to collect all these and put them in a montage to present to the

Department for Transport. Litter, cracked pavements, cars parked on pavements scaffolding and other obstructions, are all the sorts of things we are campaigning against.

You can help by going out in your local area and taking pictures. It won't take long and it would be of great use to the campaign. We can use both digital pictures and normal photographs. Unfortunately we won't be able to return photos, but we can promise they will help in the campaign.

We also recently wrote to MPs asking them to sign up to EDM 527 on the Way to Go proposals and have had some encouraging responses. At the time of writing 120 MPs had signed up to the EDM, However EDMs have far more punch if the number of signatories goes over 200. You can help by writing to your MP and asking them to sign up to the EDM, if you have not already done so.

Whinash Walk

A walk will take place on the 4th July to view the proposed site of the Whinash wind turbine development in the Lake District. This development is sited just at the edge of a National Park and its impact would be clearly visible from within the boundary.

There are two walks taking place. One is predominantly down hill and will be about 5-6 miles in length and it should be suitable for children. The other walk is longer and more challenging. This one will be about 10 miles in length.

If you would like more information about either of these walks, please contact Kyle Blue on 015396 24422, or look at the website www.nowhinashwindfarm.co.uk.

We have recently had a few enquiries at central office about our policies on wind turbine development, following an article in the Guardian which put us firmly in the camp against wind turbines. It had a quote from the president of RA Scotland, which has a stronger policy on wind turbines than RA England. It is worth noting that while we continue to campaign against wind turbines sited in inappropriate areas, we continue to judge each case on its merits and to promote the case for demand reduction and a broader spread of renewable options. We are soon to embark on a piece of research with other organisations to inform the debate about the options available to us if we are to meet our Kyoto emissions targets.

