

Countryside Update

June 2004 (issue no. 55)

Area Update

This month's update from one of the Area Countryside Secretaries comes from Bob Bridges, the Countryside Secretary in Cornwall.

Just like everywhere else around the UK, Cornwall is experiencing numerous pressures on our countryside and coastline. By and large, the planning system favours development, which is putting an even greater strain on the infrastructure, but not everyone objects – development brings economic benefits, and that is something that is really needed in Cornwall.

While they are suffering from the usual round of development proposals (in the countryside and on the beaches), at least our Areas Of Outstanding Natural Beauty are, in theory, safe but that in itself is also adding to the pressures elsewhere.

Cornwall has had their share of windfarms, and Bob feels that most people think they're not totally unacceptable where they are but this is in reference to small and medium output machines (500kW to 1 MW). If the government is to reach its target of 10 per cent from renewables by 2010 then there will be many, many more and these will be larger machines of 2MW output and above which will have far greater impact on the landscape.

For a couple of schemes proposed in North Cornwall (and west Devon) if what is read in the Western Morning News is true, we have the classic elements of a contest – on the one hand the government and big business; and on the other the public and the media. But, we can't just

oppose any scheme which produces power in the name of carbon dioxide emission reductions, for it is inevitable that fossil fuels will become more expensive and less available – and renewables will be the only option.

The trouble is that on-land wind farms are the cheapest way of producing renewable energy with the shortest payback time and the only real option for supply companies to meet their obligations. There are some interesting tried and tested alternatives such as small scale hydro (run of river) and tidal power technologies, but the economics are less favourable to the investor. How do we get the financial institutions to become sympathetic to the longer term benefits of some of the more expensive projects but which will continue to provide free electricity long after we've gone?

Walking Out in the Peak District

The Walking Out project, which has been taking place in Lincoln, Stoke and Sheffield is going well. The first five planned walks have now taken place and we are in discussions with the volunteers in each city to see how we can take this forward.

The project has been successful at introducing people to the benefits of walking and also to the countryside and green spaces close to where they live. One of the main benefits reported back to us by people who have been on the walks, is that it has led to people discovering beautiful spaces within easy reach of an urban centre – often just by taking people on routes they haven't travelled before.

| | | | |
|------------------------------|---|-----------|---|
| Circular no. Date From | 04/57 June 2004 Ramblers' Association Countryside Protection Team – Central Office Sarah Williams – Tel 020 7339 8571 Email sarahw@london.ramblers.org.uk Emily Richmond – Tel 020 7339 8541 Email emilyr@london.ramblers.org.uk 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 Extra Countryside Secretaries |
|------------------------------|---|-----------|---|

As a celebration of the walks held so far and as an end event to National Parks Week we will be holding a walk in the Peak Park on the 10th July.

The Peak Park is one of the closest National Parks to all of the cities that have taken part in the project and we hope the event will enable participants to find out about National Parks and their importance.

National Parks Around the Country

This is an exciting time for National Parks across England. We are gearing up for National Parks Week which will be held from the 1st to 9th July.

Walks are being organised in different parks to celebrate this event which is being held for the first time this year. There are currently about 20 walks organised through the Ramblers' Association, but we would love to hear about other walks taking place around that time which will mark this event.

We are also hoping that the decision on the New Forest will be announced very soon. It is expected before the Parliamentary summer recess which falls on the 22nd July. Hopefully we will be able to update you in the next issue of Countryside Update.

The inquiry into the South Downs National Park is continuing and by the time you read this the Ramblers will have appeared at their last session discussing the boundary, although the inquiry still has a long way to go and we will be appearing at later stages in the Inquiry to give our view of how the park should be administered.

We 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.

Way to Go Campaign

The Government is expected to publish its review of the transport 10 year plan in July, which means that the opportunity for influencing the plan is drawing to a close.

So far the campaign has been quite successful. It has been seen as enough of a threat to force the motoring lobby into an advertising campaign calling for extensions to the motorway network, claiming that this will solve the problems.

However, a recent opinion poll commissioned by the Way to Go campaign found that members of the RAC and AA backed better bus services, train services and increased spending on public transport over more bypasses and wider motorways. For example, 75% of AA members thought that the government should increase spending on public transport and only 31% thought that widening motorways should be a high priority.

The RAC and AA separate their lobbying arm from their members, but if you are a member of the RAC or AA your money is likely to be funding their campaign for wider motorways. If you are a member you can help by writing to the organisation and asking them to justify their lobbying when it is in opposition to the views of their members. Please contact Sarah if you would like more details of the opinion poll results, or look at the website www.waytogo.org.uk/news.asp.

Active Travel Action Plan

The Department for Transport will soon be launching its Active Travel Plan, through which it aims to promote an increase of walking and cycling as a means of travel. Although at the time of writing it had not been published, we expect it will be by the time you receive this.

The travel plan will aim to reverse the decline in walking and cycling, both to help with the fight against obesity and also to reduce congestion and travel by car. It is a sign that the government is beginning to recognise that so-called 'soft measures' are an important and cost effective way of helping transport in this country.

Many journeys under 2 miles are now made by car and it is these short journeys, which are ideal of walking, that the Department for Transport would like to see more people make on foot. It could have a substantial impact on congestion and air pollution as well on people's health. If more people can be encouraged to walk it could also reduce the amount of space that is needed for parking and other side effects of car use which take up so much space.

On the whole we are happy with the content of the plan (which is good, as we've been asking for it for 6 years!), but we are unhappy there are no targets within the plan and also no plans to set up a National Walking Board, which would have helped enormously with co-ordination of the plan.