

Countryside Update

August 2004 (issue no. 57)

Sign the Manifesto for Better Public Spaces

The RA has signed the Manifesto for Better Public Spaces, which is dedicated to creating a national consensus that parks and public spaces should be a political and financial priority. The manifesto has been organised by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE).

Good quality public spaces have been shown to have a positive impact on issues as diverse as health and well-being, ecology, crime and public safety and cohesive communities. Everyone who signs up to support this initiative will be contributing to the Delivering Sustainable Communities Summit in January 2005.

The manifesto is part of a wider campaign to encourage people to get involved in their local green spaces

You can help by looking at the website www.itsyourspace.com. This website includes practical advice and stories of successful transformations, including the project that Professor David Bellamy called a 'living example of how to make a wonderful village in the middle of the high rise blocks of a city.' You can sign up to the manifesto on the website.

If you don't have access to the internet or would like more help or information please contact Liz Brown at CABE on 020 7960 2400.

Transport White Paper Published

The government's review of the Transport White Paper 2000 was published at the end of July, issuing a new White Paper entitled *The Future of Transport: a network for 2030*. The Ramblers' Association had been campaigning as part of the Way to Go coalition to see the need for a sustainable transport system taken seriously.

The White Paper was a mixture of good and bad news. On the positive side, it was good to see the government recognise that we can't 'build our way out of congestion'. For the first time the Department for Transport (along with Defra and the DTI) has a Public Service Agreement to reduce greenhouse gases and improve air quality, this is something they had fought hard to resist. The Walking and Cycling section of the White Paper was titled 'A Positive Choice' and we were pleased to see a government commitment to working with voluntary organisations to deliver innovative ideas to promote walking (and we're sure there's a good role for the RA there!).

However there was also disappointing news in the paper. Most targets have been dropped and there is no national target for increasing walking or any mention of extra funds. The bigger disappointment is the general tone of the White Paper. It remains focused on a 'predict and provide' method of planning without giving any real credence to reducing the amount that people travel. The severance between planning and transport also remains in place with no plans to see how these two crucial government strands can be reintegrated.

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RA Joins Campaign to Stop M6 Toll Road

The Staffordshire Area of the RA has joined the campaign to stop the proposed M6 Toll Road. Recently, there was a consultation issued by the government which looks at the principle of building a new road adjacent to a part of the current M6. The idea is that the road would be privately financed and would recoup its costs through tolls.

Road user charging is being looked at increasingly as a measure of cutting congestion and is given weight in the transport White Paper. The Ramblers' Association doesn't have a policy on road user charging and will not be using this as a reason for its objection to the road. Instead we will be focusing on land take and destruction of the countryside. Harry Scott, the Area Countryside Secretary for Staffordshire will be submitting the response from the Ramblers' Association.

CAP Reform Welcome

The Ramblers' Association was pleased to see Rights of Way finally included in the cross compliance subsidy rules.

The RA has been campaigning for some time to ensure that farmers can only receive subsidies if they uphold their legal duty with regards to Rights of Way. Previously farmers could get cross compliance subsidies even if they weren't properly maintaining their Rights of Way, despite the fact that this is a legal duty.

Aviation Conference

Airportwatch will be holding a conference on the 25th September in London to help local and regional activists who are campaigning against airport expansion.

The training session will focus on campaigns skills such as dealing with the media, preparing campaigns materials and working at a regional level. These skills are transferable to other campaigns areas you may be interested in. A separate circular will be sent to Area Countryside Secretaries and Area Secretaries giving them further details. We are advising one person from each Area attends where possible.

If you would like to attend, or receive the papers after the event, please contact your Area Secretary or Area Countryside Secretary.

Planning Policy Statements 7 and 22 Published

PPSs 7 and 22 have both been published this month. The Ramblers' Association responded to earlier consultations on both of the draft versions.

PPS 7: *Sustainable Development in Rural Areas* has taken into account some of the comments we submitted in our response. It outlines the principles of sustainable development. It recognises that the urban and rural environment are interdependent and must be taken into account together. It also reinstates that National Parks and AONBs have the highest level of protection, something that was recognised in PPG7 but was changed in the draft PPS7.

Some of the other points that we raised in our response have been addressed, such as local landscape designations. In the draft PPS7 it was proposed that these should no longer be considered in planning applications. We argued against this. The result is that PPS7 allows local designations to remain where planning policies are not strong enough to protect these areas without them

Much media coverage has occurred over the 'Gummer Clause' on country houses, which is about allowing the building of architecturally exceptional large houses in areas where other development would not be allowed. This is something the Ramblers' Association opposed as it does not follow the principles of sustainable development or social inclusion.

PPS22: Renewable Energy has also recently published. We were not surprised to read that it fails to recognise the downsides of certain technologies, such as the impact on landscape. However, a companion guide to PPS22 is due out shortly and it is hoped that this will be more explicit about the tools available for preventing damage. At the time CU went to press we had not been able to go through the document and comment on it. However, a new Countryside Guidance Note will be written and distributed shortly giving information and advice on how to make the best use of it.

In next month's edition: the new Directive on Strategic Environmental Assessment – what it means and how we can use it.

